

DOCTORAL THESIS

Text Without Text: Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Writing

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Text Without Text: Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Writing

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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Abstract

Concrete poetry has been posited as the only truly international poetic movement of the 20th Century, with Conceptual writing receiving the same cultural location for the 21st-Century. Both forms are dedicated to a materiality of textual production, a poetic investigation into how language occupies space.

My dissertation, *Text Without Text: Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Writing* consists of three chapters: “Dirty”, “Clean” and Conceptual.” Chapter One outlines how degenerated text features in Canadian avant-garde poetics and how my own work builds upon traditions formulated by Canadian poets bpNichol, bill bissett and Steve McCaffery, and can be formulated as an “inarticulate mark,” embodying what American theorist Sianna Ngai refers to as a “poetics of disgust.” Chapter Two, “Clean,” situates my later work around the theories of Eugen Gomringer, the Noigandres Group and Mary Ellen Solt; the clean affectless use of the particles of language in a means which echoes modern advertising and graphic design to create universally understood poetry embracing logos, trademarks and way-finding signage. Chapter Three, “Conceptual,” bridges my concrete poetry with my work in Conceptual writing—especially my novels *Local Colour* and *Flatland*. Conceptual writing, as theorized by Kenneth Goldsmith, Vanessa Place and others, works to interrogate a poetics of “uncreativity,” plagiarism, digitally aleatory writing and procedurality.

Text Without Text: Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Writing also includes three appendices that outline my poetic *oeuvre* to date.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
Acknowledgements	4
Epigraph	5
Dedication	6
List of Works Submitted	7
List of Figures	8
Introduction	9
Chapter One: Dirty	12
Chapter Two: Clean	41
Chapter Three: Conceptual	71
Conclusion	101
Appendix 1: Derek Beaulieu's published work, 1997–2013	108
Appendix 2: Derek Beaulieu's artistic exhibitions, 1997–2013	136
Appendix 3: Editions published by Derek Beaulieu under the housepress (1997–2004) and No Press (2005–2013) imprimaturs	140
Bibliography	168

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Any piece of writing is a community act; it originates in conversation, in support, in the work done day-to-day.

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Epigraph

when yu want to know what writing is mor than anything yu look
at writing

—bill bissett, “a study uv language what can yew study”

Dedication

Maddie, it's all for you.

List of Work Submitted

Beaulieu, Derek. *flatland: a romance of many dimensions*. Web. 4 September 2014.
http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/authors/beaulieu/Beaulieu-Derek_Flatland.pdf

_____. *Kern*. Los Angeles: Les Figuees, 2014. Print.

_____. *Local Colour*. Web. 4 September 2014.
<http://eclipsearchive.org/projects/LOCAL/local.html>

_____. *Please, No More Poetry: The Poetry of Derek Beaulieu*. Ed. Kit Dobson.
Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013. Print.

_____. *Seen of the Crime: Essays on Conceptual Writing*. Web. 4 September 2014.
http://www.ubu.com/contemp/beaulieu/Beaulieu-Derek_Seen-of-the-Crime.pdf

Note: As *flatland: a romance of many dimensions*, *Local Colour* and *Seen of the Crime: Essays on Conceptual Writing* are all out of print in their physical editions, digital links are provided.

List of Figures

Figure 1: bill bissett “Quebec Bombers” (1973)	37
Figure 2: John Riddell “a shredded text” (1989) [excerpt]	38
Figure 3: Derek Beaulieu “&/or” (2000) [excerpt]	39
Figure 4: Derek Beaulieu “Trio” (2007)	40
Figure 5: Augusto de Campos “código” (1973)	65
Figure 6: Eugen Gomringer “Constellation” (1953)	66
Figure 7: Derek Beaulieu “untitled” (2008)	67
Figure 8: Derek Beaulieu “untitled” (2010)	68
Figure 9: James Carl <i>Content 1.0</i> (2002) [excerpt]	69
Figure 10: Xu Bing <i>The Book from the Ground: from point to point</i> (2013) [excerpt]	70
Figure 11: Derek Beaulieu <i>flatland: a romance of many dimensions</i> (2007) [excerpt]	98
Figure 12: Derek Beaulieu <i>Local Colour</i> (2008) [excerpt]	99
Figure 13: Derek Beaulieu <i>The Newspaper</i> (2004) [installation view]	100

Introduction

In this dissertation, *Text Without Text: Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Writing*, I examine my poetic output over the last 16 years and formulate a discourse around the close reading of Concrete poetry and Conceptual writing. My oeuvre to date is punctuated by ongoing process-based research in to the historical theorizing and contemporary praxis of Concrete poetry—a poetry which foregrounds the material of language over traditional (poetic) semantic content—coupled with ongoing editing, criticism, publishing and dissemination. Each chapter of this dissertation focuses on different stylistic subgenres of Concrete poetry and Conceptual writing as illustrated by examples of my own poetry and poetic statements and the work of historical and contemporary practitioners.

The epigraph to this dissertation, excerpted from bill bissett's *RUSH: what fuckan theory; a study uv langwage* (1971, 2012) typifies the poetry and poetics in which I am most interested. bissett exclaims, in his idiosyncratic orthography, that “when yu want to know what writing is mor than anything yu look at writing” (bissett “a study” 87).¹ bissett does not suggest that you *read* writing, simply that you *look* at it. Concrete poetry and Conceptual writing are both meant to be stared at and not read as we typically understand the term “reading.” *Text Without Text: Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Writing* consists of three chapters: “Dirty,” “Clean” and

¹ bissett's orthography has developed over 50 years of practice and is rooted in an exclamatory, speech-based poetic which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. That said, I will not edit his writing, the writing of others discussed here, nor the unique capitalization of proper names (i.e. bill bissett, bpNichol, David UU, d.a.levy) with an invasive “[sic].”

“Conceptual.”

Chapter One, “Dirty,” situates my nascent poetry—as typified by *with wax* (Coach House Books, 2003) and *fractal economies* (Talonbooks, 2006)—within a discussion of the work of Canadian poets bill bissett and John Riddell. In 2012 I co-edited, with Dr Gregory Betts, a 40th-anniversary critical edition of bissett’s seminal *RUSH: what fuckan theory; a study uv langwage* (Bookthug). In 2013 I co-edited, with Dr Lori Emerson, *Writing Surfaces: Selected Fiction of John Riddell* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press). Chapter One places my poetic practice as a refutation of Olsonian poetics and within a discussion of the politics of waste, illegibility, asemantic writing and what Sianne Ngai articulates as a “poetics of disgust” (116).

Chapter Two, “Clean,” situates my current poetic practice—as typified by *Prose of the Trans-Canada* (Bookthug, 2011) and *Kern* (Les Fiches, 2014)—within a discussion of the theories of German poet Eugen Gomringer and the Brazilian Noigandres Group (Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari). Gomringer, Pignatari and the de Campos brothers are the modernist pioneers of a poetry that embraces mid-century design as compositional models. Striving for poetry “as easily understood as signs in airports and traffic signs” (Gomringer “From Line to Constellation”)² this “heroic” period is typified by visual poems that eschew “exterior objects and/or [...] subjective feelings” in favour of corporate logos and sans-serif typefaces (de Campos et. al. “Pilot Plan”).

Chapter Three, “Conceptual,” situates my visual fiction—as typified by

² References in this dissertation foreground online sources and especially those from *UbuWeb* (www.ubu.com) and will, thus, be non-paginated. Citations from websites will consist solely of the author’s name and abbreviated title without an extraneous “n.pag.” in accordance with MLA standards.

flatland: a romance of many dimensions (information as material, 2007), *Local Colour* (ntamo, 2008) and my installation-sized artwork “The Newspaper” (2001–2004) —within the theoretical framework of Conceptual writing as theorized by Kenneth Goldsmith, Craig Dworkin and Marjorie Perloff. Conceptual writing, Goldsmith argues, results in books that are “impossible to read in the conventional sense” and demand new web-based reading strategies that include “skimming, data aggregating, the employment of intelligent agents” which “imitat[e] the way machines work” (Sanders). Goldsmith advocates for writing which demands that the reader apply digital reading tropes:

we could even say that online, by an inordinate amount of skimming in order to comprehend all the information passing before our eyes, we *parse* text—a binary process of sorting language—more than we *read* it. (Sanders “So What Exactly”)

Chapter Three also theorizes, using examples from my own work and writing by Brian Eno and Tan Lin, an *ambient poetics*; writing to be stared at but not read, much as ambient music is to be heard but not listened to.

Each chapter will also include examples of my text-based work, editorial and publishing activities, poetry, and theoretical writing to date in order to map the development of my poetic. The conclusion to this dissertation discusses some recent developments in Conceptual writing and Concrete poetry and potential spaces for further discourse.

Lastly, I include three Appendices that list my publications, exhibitions and small press editorial work from 1997 through 2013; 16 years of radical composition and community engagement.

Chapter One: Dirty

As an emerging poet at the University of Calgary, I was taught by the poetic descendants of Black Mountain College and the students of Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960). My professors attended the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference, studied under Charles Olson and Robert Creeley and wrote in a Canadian tradition that focused on the long poem, poetic place and an awareness of poetics as social activism.

As students we actively engaged with Olson's "Projective Verse" (1950) as part of ongoing discussions around the role of the poet, the physical transcription of the Olsonian breath line, and the poetic page as transcribed performative space. In "Projective Verse" Olson argues for "FIELD COMPOSITION" whereby the poet rejects the traditional stanza form in favour of the complete engagement of the field of the page, using it much as a painter engages with the entirety of a canvas (Olson "Projective Verse" 240, original emphasis). Olson continues bombastically that "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT," cribbing the dictum from Creeley's correspondence (Olson "Projective Verse" 240, original emphasis). His essay, notably, also includes a breathless endorsement of the typewriter as a compositional tool:

[i]t is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and bar a musician has had. For the first time he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his

own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work. (Olson “Projective Verse” 245)

The typewriter is, thus, simply a tool for the charting and recording of a breathed poetic; the “personal and instantaneous recorder of a poet’s work” (Olson “Projective Verse” 246). Olson’s emphasis on performance subsumes a poet’s tools (the typewriter) and physical space (the page) as a field for charting voice and breath. On the surface, Olson suggests a visual poetics informed by painting and technology. His emphasis, however, on performativity, breath and the voice—when coupled with the need to preserve an authoritative reading—belies his interest in a visual poetic. Olson argues for a voice-centered poetic exerted through the embrace of mechanistic economic development. To Olson, if poetry is to be of “*essential* use” it must

catch up and put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well of his listenings. (Olson “Projective Verse” 239, original emphasis)

Olson’s emphasis on the breath-line and

the workings of his own throat [...] that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings [...] where [...] all act springs (Olson “Projective Verse” 249)

centres poetry on the individual declaration of will. Unchallenged Olsonian poetics—

the necessity of a line or a work to be as wood is [...] to be as shaped as wood can be when a man has had his hand to it (Olson “Projective Verse” 247)

—supports (through the use of continued metaphorical construction of poetry as harvest and industry), consumption, patriarchy and a dominion over landscape and

geography. Olson links landscape and geography with a narrative drive:

[b]y landscape I mean what “narrative”; scene, event, climax, crisis, hero, development, posture; all that meant—all the substantive of what we call literary [...] you say ‘orientate me’ Yessir! Place it! (Olson “Projective Verse” 252)

“Projective Verse”—and in particular Olson’s theory of “composition by field” as poetic tool is implicitly tied with consumption and industry—defines poetry around “force,” “use,” “process,” “machinery,” and the fall of the “hammer” (Olson “Projective Verse” 239–241). While Olson suggests that “it is time we picked the fruits” (Olson “Projective Verse” 245), this expansionist, frontier-besting poetic—a poetic linked to narrative—suggests poetic dominion over not just the natural environment but also over the compositional, harvestable “field” of the page. Olson believes that the superimposition of the typewriter’s fixed-width grid upon the field of the page allows for inherently controllable, chartable poems in repeated, scored, performance.³

*

I do not share Olson’s concern with scoring poetry. As Johanna Drucker notes, much Concrete poetry is ultimately seen as intermediate; as annotation for eventual verbal / aural performance:

³ My 2008 essay “Linguistic Fragmentation as Political Intervention in Calgarian Poetry” (*Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 56, reprinted in *Open Letter* 13 6) furthers the discussion of the problematics of a speech-based poetic and applies it to the Calgarian examples of ryan fitzpatrick’s *Fake Math* and Jordan Scott’s *blert*.

[t]he concept of the page or sheet as a field of activity in which the visual presentation of a work marks a more primary engagement with the rhythm, patterns, and emphasis of phonemes within language as an aural work [...] the outstanding features of language were its phonemic and phonetic qualities and visual devices served primarily as a means of emphatically attending to these elements in their own right, often loosed from constraints of conventional meaning production. (Drucker “Experimental / Visual / Concrete” 122)

In Drucker’s estimation Concrete poetry is phonetic and closely linked to Sound poetry as a means of exploring the poetic potentialities of non-semantic signification while attending to classic structures of rhythm and metrics. English Concrete poet Bob Cobbing, on the other hand, theorizes that all text is potential score:

[a] text is both a completed action in itself and the signal for renderings, vocal, in musical form, in movement, with lights or electronics, in many ways, singly or in combination. A text can be appreciated for itself, or for the suggestions of sound, movement, etc. which it prompts in the viewer. (Cobbing “Notions” 31)

In my own practice, I do not use Concrete poetry as a means of phonocentric performance. My work is neither intended to be voiced (as typified by Canada’s sound poetry quartet *The Four Horsemen*) nor recorded (as typified by France’s Pierre Garnier). I believe that allowing the work to function as cipher or image of potentiality is of more interest than associating the work directly with a sound-based performance.

bpNichol argued in 1971 that “this involvement with sound has been the basic one for the majority of Canadian ‘[C]oncrete’ poets” (Nichol “Passwords” 52) but I

believe that phonocentric Concrete poetry underlines the role of the poet as arbiter of authoritative reading and performance. Asserting Concrete poetry as tightly linked to sound poetry, and thus to performance, is to foreground meaning-making as remaining with the author and to insist that poetry must be spoken in order to be affective.

*

I am dedicated, as part of my on-going practice, to the development and dissemination of critical discourse around Concrete poetry. As Craig Dworkin notes in *Reading the Illegible*, when appraising Concrete poetry

we lack a sophisticated critical tradition and ready vocabulary. In fact, when such matters are considered at all, any radical deviation from a printing norm is generally taken to be a more important classificatory element for poetry than the underlying theoretical conceptions of representation [and] performance. (Dworkin *Reading* 32)

To say that there is a lack of criticism on Concrete poetry is to overstate the matter—it is discussed by such noted critics as Marjorie Perloff, Kenneth Goldsmith, Craig Dworkin, A.S. Bessa and Johanna Drucker—though much of that criticism situates this poetic historically, limiting its discussion to exemplars from the 1950s through 1970s. In a claim similar to Dworkin's, Perloff states

it was only when the 'form:content' assumption of concretism was abandoned [...] that a more adequate poetics was born. (Perloff "From Avant-garde" 52)

For, as John Cage said, "[n]ow about material: is it interesting? It is and it isn't" (Cage "Lecture" 114).

*

It is important to note that there is some disagreement around the use of the term “Concrete poetry.” I interviewed Paul Dutton (Canadian sound poet, member of *CCMC* and former member of *The Four Horsemen*) in 1999 and Darren Wershler-Henry⁴ (Canadian Concrete and Conceptual poet and former editor of *Coach House Books*) in 2000 for *filling Station* magazine about the problematics around “Concrete poetry” and the more internationally accepted term “Visual poetry.” Dutton explained that, in his opinion, “Concrete poetry” as a sub-genre categorization

[i]nitially referred to both sound and visual poetry of the time, the idea being that these approaches to language treated linguistic components (sentences, words, syllables, letters, phonemes) as objects with concrete existence of their own—either visual or sonic—apart from or in addition to their abstract signification of things other than themselves. (Beaulieu “Treated Linguistic Components” 11)

Dutton argues that “Concrete poetry” is best

[r]estricted its use to visual poems of a certain era (late ’50s or early ’60s to late ’60s or early ’70s) or a certain style (roughly the style prevailing in that era). (Beaulieu “Treated Linguistic Components” 11)

Dutton implicates Wershler-Henry in keeping the term “Concrete poetry” in the critical discourse, and Wershler-Henry replies to Dutton in a second interview in which he discusses Derrida’s idea of the

paleonym [...] a word with a certain archaism to it that’s been

⁴ Darren Wershler-Henry has since returned his name to Darren Wershler, and in this dissertation I will refer to him as both “Darren Wershler” or “Darren Wershler-Henry” depending on the date of the publication referenced. Regardless of his last name, all references will be bibliographically listed as “Wershler-Henry, Darren.”

deliberately retained, partly to maintain some sort of trace of the
history of an argument. (Beaulieu “A New Medium Immediately” 10)

Wershler-Henry argues that it is precisely because the term “Concrete poetry” is limited to a certain period and aesthetic concern that it should be troubled and used out of place:

rather than establish or maintain a specious binary between two inaccurate terms [...] we get to acknowledge the contradictions as part of the defining moment AND piss off a few people who have real hard-ons for policing the halls of literature (they do exist, even in the cluttered little broom closet of [C]oncrete and [V]isual poetry).

(Beaulieu “A New Medium Immediately” 10, original emphasis)

It is precisely in this spirit that I continue to use “Concrete” as my preferred term and why I continue to develop my writing practice.⁵

⁵ Robin Laurence in *Michael Morris: Illusion, Allusion, and an Idea of the Concrete* argues that the difference between concrete poetry and visual poetry is that the former is strikingly abstract while the latter is illustrative:

Definitions of concrete poetry often overlap with those of visual poetry. In the latter, elements of written language—words, sentences, punctuation marks, line lengths, spacing, and other typographical qualities including shape and colour of the characters—are conceived in such a way as to enhance the poem’s syntax and convey its literal content. Visual poetry is intended to look like and therefore convey its literal meaning. [...] In concrete poetry, words, letters, numbers, glyphs, signs, symbols, fonts and accents function purely visually, “free not only of semantic but syntactical necessities.” (Laurence *Michael Morris*)

*

Olson's "Projective Verse" ultimately focuses on enforcing concerns for the writer—issues surrounding the creation and performance of written text. The typewriter allows the writer an "exact" mechanistic means of transcribing the breath as a means of allowing the reader to accurately mimic the poet's performance by "indicat[ing] how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work" (Olson "Projective Verse" 245). Olson's focus on the typewriter as mechanistic enabling of the poetic "stave and bar" occludes the page designer's concerns for the look, design and aesthetics of the page. To Olson, the poem is most effective when typewritten but not typeset. Olson's "COMPOSITION BY FIELD" (Olson "Projective Verse" 240, original emphasis) suggests an awareness of the potential for a visual poetry but ultimately his poetic dictum foreshadows the concerns of visual poets in only the most basic of ways. Olson's focus on performance and poetic score foregrounds not just the poet's voice, but also his (and in Olson's writing the poet's voice is consistently male) drive for clarity, growth and readability. It is all too easy to see Olson's field composition alongside his "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT" (Olson "Projective Verse" 240, original emphasis) as a guiding tenet of Concrete poetry. By focusing solely on the alignment of form and content criticism of Concrete poetry restricts itself to the formal potential of the traditionally semantic content (phrases, words, letters, marks, etc.). By moving past the arrangement of letters on the page, criticism can explore Concrete poetry's political and poetic implications.

*

Canadian poet and critic Frank Davey remarks to bpNichol in the first issue of *The Open Letter* "I still find [Concrete poetry] irrelevant to what I know as poetry"

(Davey “Dear Fred” 3) and later that “of course Pound’s method is the best” (Davey “David, George” 17). Parallel to my introduction to Olson’s work and *The New American Poetry*—with its emphasis on place, breath and form—I also pursued self-directed study on Canadian Concrete poetry focusing on the work of bpNichol, bill bissett, Steve McCaffery, John Riddell and other Canadian practitioners. Nichol, bissett, McCaffery and Riddell are each key figures in the understanding of the development of Canadian Concrete poetry. These four poets, when coupled with poets Judith Copithorne, Raoul Duguay, David UU (a.k.a David W. Harris) and David Aylward, represent the most prominent practitioners of Concrete poetry in Canada, so much so that any work since the late 1970s invariably is compared to these earlier examples.⁶

The work of bpNichol (Barrie Phillip Nichol) set the bar for much Concrete poetry in Canada, and he is the only Canadian contributor to the 3 major collections of international Concrete poetry (see note 9 below). As a poet and publisher, Nichol was deeply invested in Dom Sylvester Houédard’s term “borderblur;” the investigative crossover of literary and performative boundaries as a means of exploring the edges of poetic possibility. Nichol died unexpectedly in 1988 and although his work remains in print largely due to the efforts of Toronto’s Coach

⁶ Concrete poetry has remained an active but marginalized site for poetic production in Canada continuously from the 1960s through to the present. As such, and reflective of the communities and discourses within which I operate, the majority of the examples and critics from which I cite in this dissertation are Canadian.

House Books,⁷ his influence within emerging generations of writers is waning. Nichol's work is no longer studied with the frequency in which it once was, but continues to offer a number of exceptional engagements with poetics and small press publishing that adds to our understanding of Canadian Concrete poetry.⁸ Nichol remains one of the few Canadian poets who consistently produced both Concrete poetry and criticism and thus needs to be engaged within Canadian poetic discourse.⁹ Nichol, in Ron Mann's 1983 film *Echoes without Saying*, describes print, in an Olsonian moment, as "the frozen record of sound" which foregrounds the performativity of the page and a focus on notational poetics (Mann *Echoes*).

Alongside that declaration is the development of so-called "Dirty Concrete," a form exhibited in each of Nichol, bissett and McCaffery's *oeuvres*, and one that I vigorously pursue in *with wax* (Coach House Books, 2003) and *fractal economies* (talonbooks, 2006).

⁷ With additional volumes from Talonbooks, Back Moss Press, BookThug and Nightboat. Nichol's archival and out of print work has become a poetic industry unto itself.

⁸ My own small-press publishing, very much inspired by Nichol's *grOnk* and *Ganglia* presses, is documented in Appendix 3. Since 1997 under the *housepress* (1997–2004) and *No Press* (2005–present) imprimaturs I have published over 550 different publications from experimental writers worldwide.

⁹ With *Frogments from the Frag Pool: haiku after Basho* (Toronto: The Mercury press, 2006) Gary Barwin and I collaboratively work though Nichol's influence. Nichol—along with dom Sylvester Houédard and Steve McCaffery—created a series of playful translation of Matsuo Basho's haiku. *Frogments from the Frag Pool* continues in that tradition.

As a categorizing term, Dirty Concrete¹⁰

was first used either by bpNichol, bill bissett, or Stephen Scobie [...]

the term is almost certainly Canadian in origin (Emerson 121)

referring to Concrete poetry which exhibits a “deliberate attempt to move away from the clean lines and graphically neutral appearance” (Emerson 120) of the “heroic” Concrete poem.¹¹ Dirty Concrete is exemplified by a embracing illegibility—or what d.a.levy refers to as “experiments in disintegrational syntax”—with prominent examples being bissett’s “Quebec Bombers” (1973), McCaffery’s *Carnival The First Panel: 1967–70* (1970) and much of Riddell’s work including *Writing Surfaces: Selected Fiction of John Riddell* (2013).¹²

Canadian critic Stephen Scobie goes so far as to temporally dismiss Concrete

¹⁰ See Lori Emerson’s “A Brief History of Dirty Concrete by Way of Steve McCaffery’s *Carnival* and Digital D.I.Y.” for a fascinating exploration of the history of the terms “Dirty” and “Clean” Concrete poetry—a history which does not **seem** to have a discernible initial usage.

¹¹ I will discuss the classical, “heroic,” Concrete poem of the 1950s and 1960s in Chapters 2 and 3.

¹² Within an international framework, English poets Ian Hamilton Finlay and Dom Sylvester Houédard created “Clean” Concrete poetry while Bob Cobbing (and many of the writers associated with *Writers Forum*) exemplify “Dirty” Concrete. Canadian poets would have been familiar with these examples through the three major collections of Concrete poetry published in the late 1960s: Mary Ellen Solt’s *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968), Emmett Williams’s *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1967, reissued 2013) and Stephen Bann’s *Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology* (1967), and through personal correspondence.

poetry as “what concrete poets made between 1955 and 1970” (Scobie *bpNichol* 31). He sniffs that its Canadian roots are “muddled,” “accidental,” “haphazard” (Scobie *bpNichol* 33) and indicative of a poetic dead-end; a quaint moment of hippie-ish dilettantism quickly abandoned by more serious authors: “as a unified, coherent movement, [C]oncrete poetry was short-lived” (Scobie *bpNichol* 30). Kenneth Goldsmith, founder and editor of *UbuWeb*, playfully jabs at Concrete poetry as being “a little, somewhat forgotten movement in the middle of the last century” and little more than jovial, wide-eyed play written with a noted lack of discipline and a haze of goofy, world-changing optimistic spirituality (Goldsmith *Uncreative* 54).

McCaffery’s *Carnival The First Panel: 1967–70* opens with a quotation from the 1920 *de stijl* manifesto that “for the modern writer form will have a direct spiritual meaning” a statement from which McCaffery has since distanced himself (McCaffery *Carnival*). *Carnival*, for all of its formal innovation, is laden with “incredibly naïve” text that now “embarrasses” the author (Nichol “Annotated” 72). While *Carnival* is a “repudiation of breath-based poetics” (McCaffery *Seven Pages* 445), it replaces Olsonian concerns with spiritual references to the Tower of Babel, Adam and Eve and the Tree of Life. Much contemporary criticism of Dirty Concrete from the 1960s and 70s is typified by Nichol’s overly fluffy description of bissett’s work as having a

sensitivity to the moving spirit which manifests itself as language and allowing it to show itself thru you in whatever way seems natural to it. (Nichol “Passwords” 55)

My colleague Lori Emerson argues that Dirty Concrete exhibits a

deliberate attempt to move away from the clean lines and graphically neutral appearance of the Concrete poem from the 1950s and 60s [...] (a cleanliness that can also be construed to indicate a lack of political

engagement with language and representation). (Emerson “A Brief History” 120)

I will explore the perceived “lack of political engagement” in Clean Concrete in Chapter Two and believe that much contemporary criticism on Dirty Concrete poetry in Canada during the 60s and 70s is typified by a joyful exuberance, justified and rationalized as a libidinal outpouring of excess. Stephen Scobie, for example, exemplifies the type of criticism that Perloff denigrates when he states that Concrete poems

are usually lucid and simple. Their appeal is often more sensuous than intellectual, more immediate than dependent on long study. (Scobie *bpNichol* 34)

Scobie continues, arguing, that Concrete poems “impart [...] very positive feelings” as “one can see the making of the poem, and the joy of [...] language revel[ing] in its intrinsic resources” as “the reader is set at liberty to enter the text and discover/create meaning on her own terms” (Scobie *bpNichol* 34).

In opposition to these readings—most vociferously offered by Steve McCaffery—this style of Concrete poetry is best recuperated through a discussion of Sianne Ngai’s formulation of a “poetics of disgust” which

deliberately interferes with close reading, a practice based on the principle that what is at stake in every textual encounter is a hidden or buried object, a concept of symbolic meaning that can be discovered by the reader only if she or he reads “deeply” enough (Ngai “Raw Matter” 116).

bissett's "Quebec Bombers" [see Figure 1]¹³ typifies Dirty Concrete poetry with its overlaid text, use of mixed-media (typewriter and dry-transfer lettering in this case) and embrace of palimpsestic illegibility and anti-representationality.

"Quebec Bombers" is a rare example of a Concrete poem that is overtly self-reflexive. bissett aligns his poetic illegibility with explicit support for the Marxist-Leninist, cell-based, paramilitary group the *Front de Libération du Québec* (FLQ): "what can we say [...] keep yr cell clen [...] in praise of all quebec bombers" a voice-centred chant layered on a stanza of "dirt dirdirdirdirdirt." McCaffery pedantically warns

what must be kept in mind at this point is that the coupled
legible/illegible always marks the site of desired production
(McCaffery "Bill Bissett" 106n.)

which "releases a non-verbal energy" (McCaffery "Bill Bissett" 101). While avoiding further close-reading of bissett's poem, "Quebec Bombers" is, rather than a space of "desired production," an example of the poetic "inarticulate mark." bissett does not produce a cogent, emotionally-laden poetic treatise on political injustice; he creates a *lump* of text through the disjunctive use of corporate and design material. This poetics of disgust undermines desire as a motivating poetic purpose as

[w]hat is especially unsatisfying about "desire" as a critical concept is
the romanticization which so frequently accompanies its use. Desire

¹³ Labeling Concrete poems as "Figures" is problematic as it applies the typographical and layout standards for illustrations to a poetic—and thus literary—object. This uncomfortable designation embodies the reception and criticism of Concrete poetry as a whole: readers and critics are often unsure whether to apply literary or artistic categorizations to the poetic object at hand.

treated as if it were something spiritual, elevated to the point that it has become a mysticism rather than a materialism. (McCaffery “Bill Bissett” 101)

In “Raw Matter: a Poetics of Disgust” Ngai theorizes a space which articulates the poetic response towards the hegemony and capitalism. As capitalism

imposes a limit on our ways of expressing outrage [and] *has the effect of deliberately curbing our potential to articulate our abhorrence to it* (Ngai “Raw Matter” 98, original emphasis)

Ngai believes that the more frequent emotive response is that of rejection, exhibited

not a moving *toward* the object, either to possess or be possessed by it, engulf or be engulfed by it [...] but a turning *away*” (Ngai “Raw Matter” 101, original emphasis)

accompanied by an “inarticulate utterance”—a reflexive gagging (Ngai “Raw Matter” 102). Ngai’s article has not been adopted by poets as far as I am aware but I believe that the “inarticulate utterance” is well-suited for adoption by Concrete poets as an “inarticulate mark” in order to situate Dirty Concrete poetry’s refusal to operate as semantically-grounded poetry.

As bpNichol playfully states “[a]ll that signifies can be sold” (Nichol “Catalogue” 161) and as Sianne Ngai vehemently argues “most forms of cultural subversion are ultimately contained” (Ngai “Raw Matter” 101). The inarticulate mark—the Dirty Concrete poem—“thwarts close reading” (Ngai “Raw Matter” 102) as it doesn’t work along expected signifying chains; it “won’t coagulate into a unitary meaning and it also won’t move; it can’t be displaced” (Ngai “Raw Matter” 114). It is precisely this resistance to displacement and refusal to co-operate which best exemplifies Dirty Concrete poetry: a poetry that co-opts degenerated text, literal

fragmentation, palimpsestic text and *waste* as poetic tropes.

Concrete poetry's resistance to *reading*, and close-reading in particular, foregrounds the materiality of language, the rubble with which poets are left after the commercialization and co-opting of poetry and poetics for marketing, sales and government. Dirty Concrete rejects the spoken in favour of the written, and then rejects the legible in favour of the illegible. Instead of trying to reclaim poetry as generative, Dirty Concrete sits there, unwilling to participate, unwilling to mean, unwilling to do anything other than simply take up space:

[t]he poet's expression of inexpressiveness thrusts the base materiality of language into the foreground [...h]ere the question of what a word means [...] as well as the question of how it relates abstractly to another word in the system [...] becomes secondary to its simply "being there," in all its insistence and affective force. (Ngai "Raw Matter" 106)

Vito Acconci postulates that poetry can "use language to cover a space rather than discover a meaning" (Acconci "Early Work" 4)—an argument that I return to in Chapter Three's discussion of Conceptual writing. I am drawn to the thought of a poetry which refuses to be *poetic* and does everything it can to use the semantic "tools" of poetry in a way which

bear[s] witness to its creator's articulate expression of his or her own inarticulateness, or to his or her potential to not-express, or not be articulate. (Ngai "Raw Matter" 104)

Dirty Concrete poetry lays bare the myth of transparency. Instead of the page operating as a smooth medium for clear, emotional transference, it is the site of a lump, a wad, a knot of immovable refuse.

In a review of Shaunt Basmajian's suite *Quote Unquote* (Toronto: Old Nun Publications, 1978), bpNichol describes the overprinted, obliterated text as

watching all the hesitancies, the imperfections, the stops & starts,
being caught as in a photograph, a picture of the impermanent world,
but one [...] inviting you to cross out words you don't approve of.

(Nichol "Tabling" 199)

Here "the hesitancies, the imperfections, the stops & starts" embody the inarticulate, the search for a poetic that gags and hacks, whose gorge rises. I believe that this Dirty Concrete poetry rejects the "valorization of the representational" (McCaffery "Writing" 202) in favour of a hairball of indigestible matter.

*

In Dirty Concrete poetry the author-function is fulfilled both by the biological author of the text and the technology the poet used to create.¹⁴ Business machines and tools move beyond the role of mere device in Concrete poetry through a poetics of waste and refuse to a role closer to that of author / reader. Echoing Marshall McLuhan, bpNichol suggests that in Dirty Concrete "the machine is the message [...] the text itself ultimately disappears" (Nichol *Sharp Facts*).¹⁵

¹⁴ I use "create" here instead of "write" to further embrace Concrete poetry as a material process.

¹⁵ My 2003 essay "'Misshapen Chaos of well-seeming forms': Restricted and General Economies in the Concrete Poetry of John Riddell, Darren Wershler-Henry and Steve McCaffery" (*Open Letter* 11 8) builds upon this argument and applies a discussion of Georges Bataille's idea of the poetic interplay between a general and restricted economy. This essay was reworked and extended as "an afterword after words: notes towards a concrete poetic" in *fractal economies* (2006).

The message of poetry is no longer the humanist, confessionalist drive for emotive outpouring; the biological poet is subsumed here under the voice of the machine itself. Dirty Concrete teeters on the hesitating ledge of the obsolescent technological moment. Concrete poetry of this sort is most frequently made with office machines (photocopiers, shredders, fax machines) or analog media technology (dry-transfer lettering, stencils). Decidedly pre-digital, Dirty Concrete allows for the accidental and unintended,

[i]t's extraordinarily difficult to produce a "dirty" [C]oncrete poem on a computer, because the level of pixel-by-pixel manipulation imparts at least the illusion that everything is potentially controllable. (Wershler-Henry *Nicholodeon*)

*

These poems embody de Certeau's formulation of *la perruque* whereby "the worker's own work [is] disguised as work for his employer:"

[i]t differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. [...] Accused of stealing or turning material to his own ends and using the machines for his own profit, the worker who indulges in *la perruque* actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit. In the very place where the machine he must serve reigns supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his work and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through *spending* his time in this way. (de

Certeau 25–26, original emphasis)

de Certeau parenthetically allots to artistic exploration exactly the material of the Dirty Concrete poem; “not goods [...] only scraps” (de Certeau 25). de Certeau argues that the purpose of *la perruque* is to assert the author’s presence as a creative force outside of the prescriptive tasks of the factory floor. I extend his formulation to the embracing of the machine as *producer* of text, the result of an authorial intervention away from the production of correct, productive, legible documents. Poets are not attempting to assert their individuality and “signify [their] own capabilities,” they express their refusal to participate by creating unreadable, illegible, inarticulate expressions of disgust.

The shifting distinction of authorial voice in machine-based Concrete poetry revolves not only around textual “meaning,” but also the categorization of text and the role of writer in book production and consumption. These texts are the documentation of the *waste* and *excess* produced through non-prescribed use of business machines. The documentation of this libidinal excess, this waste, categorizes “the letter not as phoneme but as ink, and further insist[s] on that materiality” (McCaffery “Bill Bissett” 105). By using the machines for unintended purposes “non-meaning” erupts in the creation of productive business-related documents. Dirty Concrete doesn’t formulate itself on the meaningful, it works as an interfering literary moment, producing “gratuitous products” which occupy space. Machine-based poetry questions both the author-function and the way that text accumulates and is dispersed on the page.

In a discussion of my Concrete poetry, Sina Queyras argues that

the resistance to close reading is a resistance to commodified language,
and to specific ways of reading, to specific meaning, not to looking,

but rather perhaps that which is too easily ingested [...t]he [C]oncrete poem is an interruption of value exchange, and on a practical level it offers a moment of silence for those who might acknowledge the passing of meaning.

Pause.

Look.

Suffice. (Queyras *Unleashed* 44–45)

*

With “a shredded text” [see Figure 2], John Riddell composes a traditional piece of narrative-driven fiction, but in the final act of the text’s creation he fed the entire manuscript through a paper shredder and published the results. “a shredded text” equates the roles of editor and publisher to that of a machine designed to obfuscate, hide and destroy. The finished text is a record of waste,

a tangle of page strips excreted from the nether end of a paper shredder.” (Wershler-Henry “Concatenation” 124)

Riddell, as author, becomes implicit in a restricted economy acting as editor to confine the amount of waste that is permitted to enter the manuscript of book. The normally restrictive site of creation (the business machine) becomes creator of excess and non-semantic writing. Riddell is the editor, the voice of restraint and reason, attempting to limit the presentation of continuous waste production as writing. But Riddell is also collaborating with the machine (and his collaborators are by no means limited to shredders; he also utilizes 3-hole punches, typewriters, stencils, photocopiers, and even, on occasion, human collaborators such as Richard Truhlar, bpNichol and Franc Reyes) in a troubling of writing as writing. Legible poetics are discarded in favour of the documentation of a reading machine’s waste as textual

production. The paper shredder fractures the text through a “willing error” from a single united field of meaning with accepted social value to a series of pieces increasing “the rate and momentum of [...] disposal” (McCaffery “Writing” 220) spreading value across a larger field.

*

In his introduction to *The Last Blewointment Anthology Volume II*, a retrospective overview of bill bissett’s magazine and publishing house *blewointment*, bpNichol relates a story of when he visited bissett’s studio:

i visited bill in the summer of 66 while he was putting the issue together. He was cranking stuff out on an old 1903 ABDick mimeo the day i arrived. i looked at the pieces he was running off [...] on random sized bits of paper he’d culled from the garbage behind some print shop. The texts were blurred and bordering on unreadable. i said, “bill, you can’t read these!” and bill said, “yeah, but they’re in print.”
(Nichol “Introduction” 419)

This recounting may seem indicative of an ill-defined editorial stance, a romantic attachment to publishing which ignores the need for quality control, editorial acumen and, if nothing else, legibility. Publishing on “random sized bits of paper he’d culled from the garbage behind some print shop”¹⁶ suggests that bissett’s output more properly fits within a discussion of both *la perruque* and a poetics of disgust.

*

¹⁶ There are a number of stories of small press publishers using scrap from behind Toronto’s Coach House Books to form their own editions, including Jay Millar’s *Bookthug*. Coach House Books’s founder Stan Bevington often invites those erstwhile publishers inside to get a better introduction to the process of book publishing.

My poetry, especially *fractal economies* (2006),¹⁷ includes several examples written under the umbrella of *la perruque* while working as a draftsman for a major international oil and gas exploration and construction contractor, culling the scraps and garbage for images which could be poetically swerved to a new discourse.¹⁸ These images retain an uncanny echo of their original use; the reader knows that the original context pulls the content away from the poetic and yet the work sits within

¹⁷ Christine Stewart, in *Canadian Literature* writes:

In Derek Beaulieu's *[f]ractal [e]conomies*, language regards itself, stalks itself, begins, slowly, to eat itself. The poems devour words and shred meaning [...]. Beaulieu's use of Letraset is exemplary of his poetic "where the author function is fulfilled by both the biological 'author' of the text and the technology by which it is created." The maimed Letraset manifests the mortality of signification. Meaning's demise quickens after "summer skies" (which is inexplicably beautiful) when there is a shift to typed text and then to the edge of a Xerox smudge. Page 39 is a faded rectangular shape of points of ink. The focus is tight; the reader is faced with the basics of print technology: black ink, white page. At the end of the book, perhaps anticipating readerly difficulty, Beaulieu provides an "afterward after words" that defines his concrete poetry as rhizomatic writing [...]. In *[f]ractal [e]conomies*, we must face meaning, its shifting points and inky guts. (Stewart "Sounding")

¹⁸ Certainly the most prominent poet in this field is Bern Porter. Porter's *Found Poems* (Something Else Press, 1972) is the best example of a poetry made from swerved and re-contextualized scrap.

that of poetry. In “new directions in canadian poetry” (beaulieu *fractal economies* 51) I removed a document intended to diagram the building of a hydrocarbon processing plant from my employer’s recycle bin. This proprietary diagram, when re-titled and placed within the context of a book of Albertan poetry, snidely comments on the designated space allotted to culture in an economy driven by petroleum exploration.

Also in *fractal economies* is the poetic suite “&/or.” Dedicated to Darren Wershler-Henry, “&/or” is a 5-poem suite of photocopy degenerations executed at my workplace. Wershler-Henry’s Conceptual novel *the tapeworm foundry* (2000) is a collection of poetic and artistic ideas linked together by the neologism “andor” in a single unpunctuated endless sentence. The book closes with a reference to an “embalmed irishman” and the “fragments of a language yet to be combined like so much flotsam and” which links to the opening: “or jetsam in the laminar flow andor” creating a single repeating stream of poetic potentialities (Wershler-Henry *tapeworm*). Wershler-Henry did not need to execute any of the ideas he proposes; he simply lists them all, “planting his flag” in each one in an act of literary hubris. With “&/or” I typed, using an antiquated IBM Selectric typewriter, Wershler-Henry’s neologism “andor” in the middle of a blank page. By starting this process at my “day job” already the piece had diverted my time away from my designated task (and meant that my employer was unwittingly paying me to type nonsense on otherwise blank pieces of paper). James Sherry, in a quotation often attributed to Charles Bernstein, argues in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Magazine*:

[i]s language always a commodity? Clearly not in the case when blank paper costs money and a poem put on it cannot be given away. (Sherry “A, B, \$.” 42)

Those five sheets of paper were purchased and supplied to me in order to fulfill my

role in a corporate environment, much as the typewriter itself had been, however:

[a]s James Sherry has observed, a blank piece of paper is worth about 4 cents, but as soon as you print a poem on it, it's rendered economically worthless. (Dworkin *No Medium* 173)

Using the office's photocopier, I enlarged the typewritten "andor," through dozens of iterations until it expanded beyond the point of legibility into a poem visually reminiscent of a mathematical fractal.¹⁹

"Trio" is an occasional poem I contributed to a 2007 issue of *Open Letter* [see Figure 4]. I created "Trio," squarely in the tradition of Riddell and bissett, from the poetic outburst of my failing inkjet printer. The printer, in a moment of poetic indigestion, gathered more than one sheet of paper and had an ensuing paper-jam. This log-jam of input, and the resultant skewed output, reflects Ngai's inarticulate utterance for not only was the noise created by the printer exemplary of much sound and noise poetry, but it also spread the resultant poem over three incorrectly-fed sheets of paper. The resultant poem, printed in the overlapping spaces, is a blob of inarticulate text, printed on the extreme margins of the page. This outburst refuses the designated space reserved for discourse in favour of a space barely on the page at all. In "Trio" the overwritten, illegible text is disintegrated over 3 separate spaces, each an accidental slice occupying a position meant to be clean, clear and held quietly.

*

It is the responsibility of poetry to be unassimilatable and awkward, to be unchewable gristle embedded within the T-bone steak of digestible meaning. Charles Bernstein argues that

¹⁹ It is this fractal that inspired the title of the book in which it is found: *fractal economies*.

if poetry were a craft that there is a right way or wrong way to do [...] I prefer the wrong way—anything better than the well-wrought epiphany of predictable measure—for at least the cracks and flaws and awkwardnesses show signs of life. (Bernstein “State” 2)

The well-wrought epiphany reifies poetry as poetry and disallows the poetic space as the gagging inarticulate mark of refusal. Bernstein’s “signs of life” when read through the poetry of Riddell, Bissett and other poets who embrace the business machine as composer (and not just as compositional tool) ascribe an intriguing intentionality to non-sentient “poets.”²⁰ If we ascribe the role of poet to the machine, and thus see work like “a shredded text” as collaborative, the inarticulate utterance is expelled by both by the biological poet (in protest of her role in cultural production) and the mechanical poet (in protest of its role in capitalist production).

The inarticulate mark and the performative silence of Dirty Concrete poetry declares a separation between form and content (despite Olson’s edict) as the marks on the page; the smeared ink, the shredded texts, the misprinted fractured texts each point to a poetry unwilling to signify, unwilling to proclaim.

In the face of a need to bear witness to inarticulateness “[n]othing more than nothing can be said” (Cage “Lecture” 111).

²⁰ See also Christian Bök’s “The Piecemeal Bard Is Deconstructed: Notes Toward a Potential Robopoetics” online at *UbuWeb*.

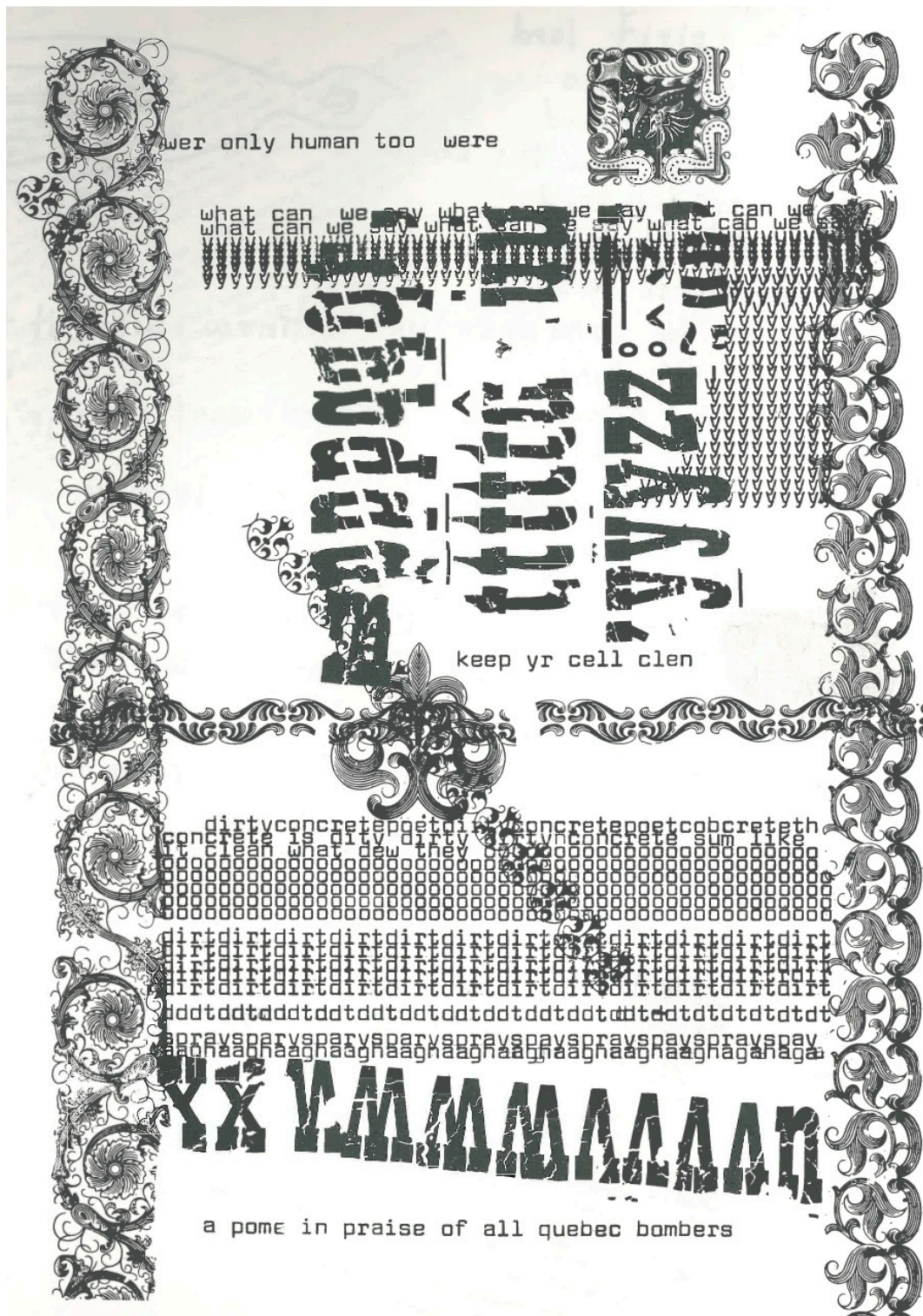


Figure 1: bill bissett "Quebec Bombers" (1973)

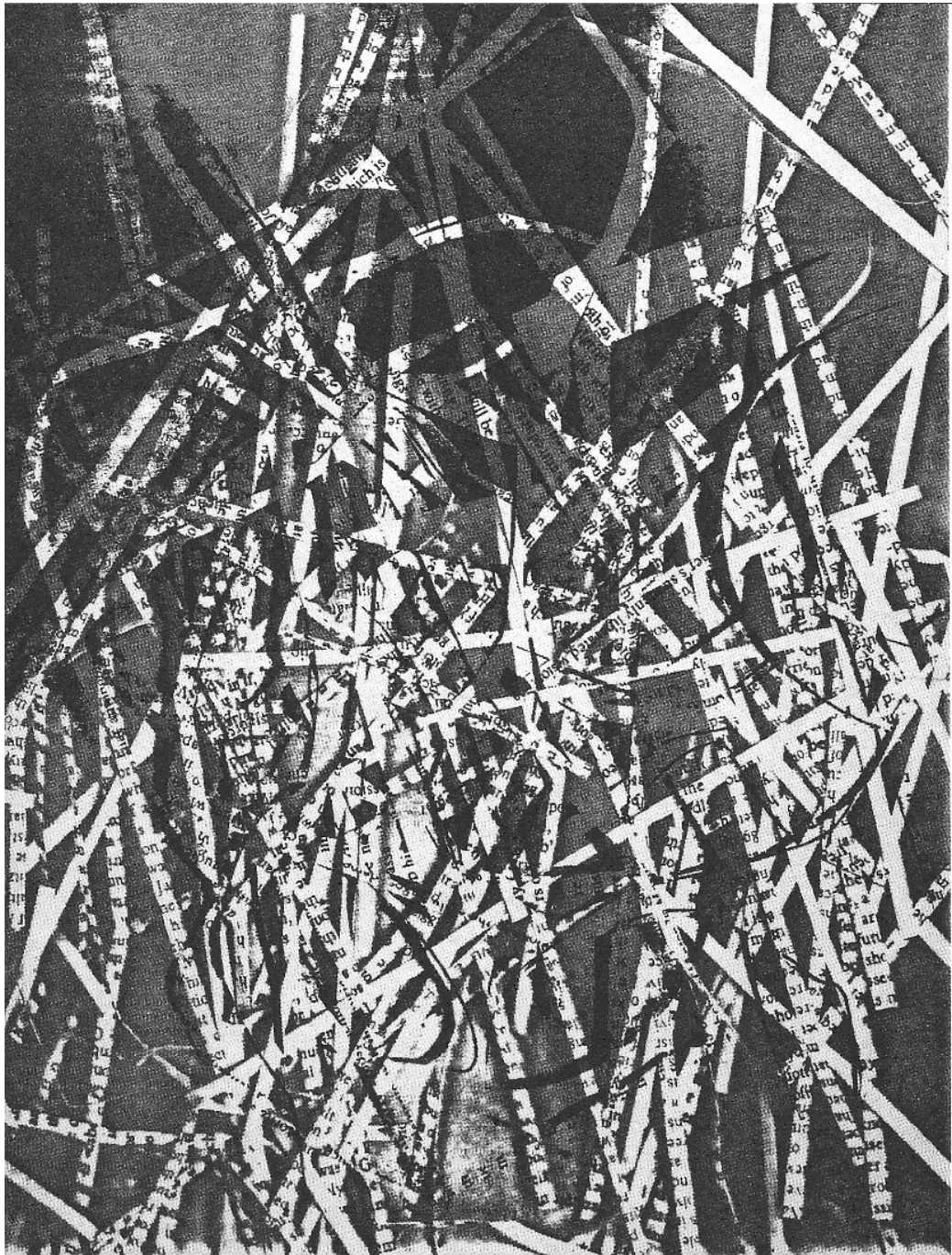


Figure 2: John Riddell “a shredded text” (1989) [excerpt]

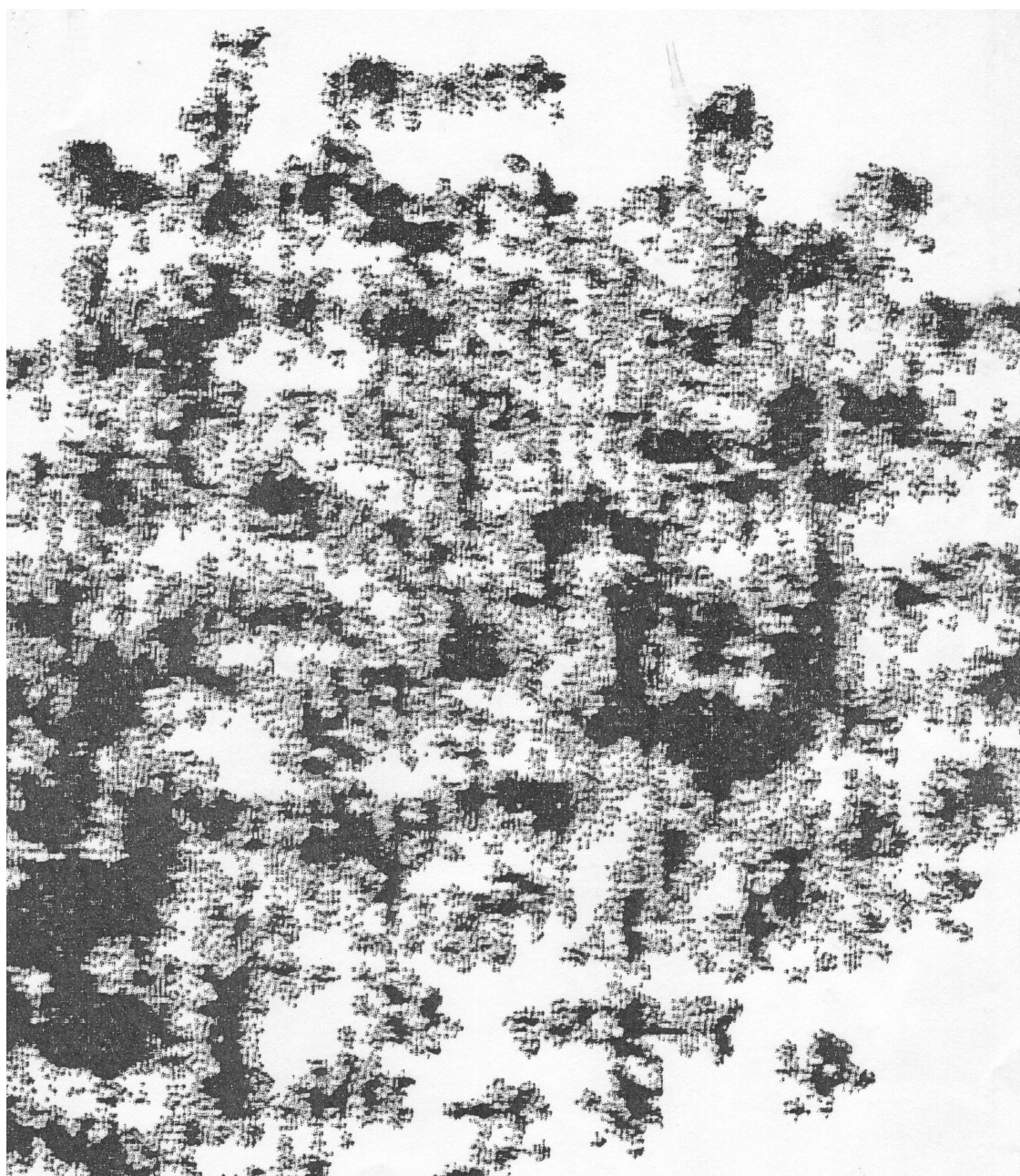


Figure 3: Derek Beaulieu “&/or” (2000) [excerpt]

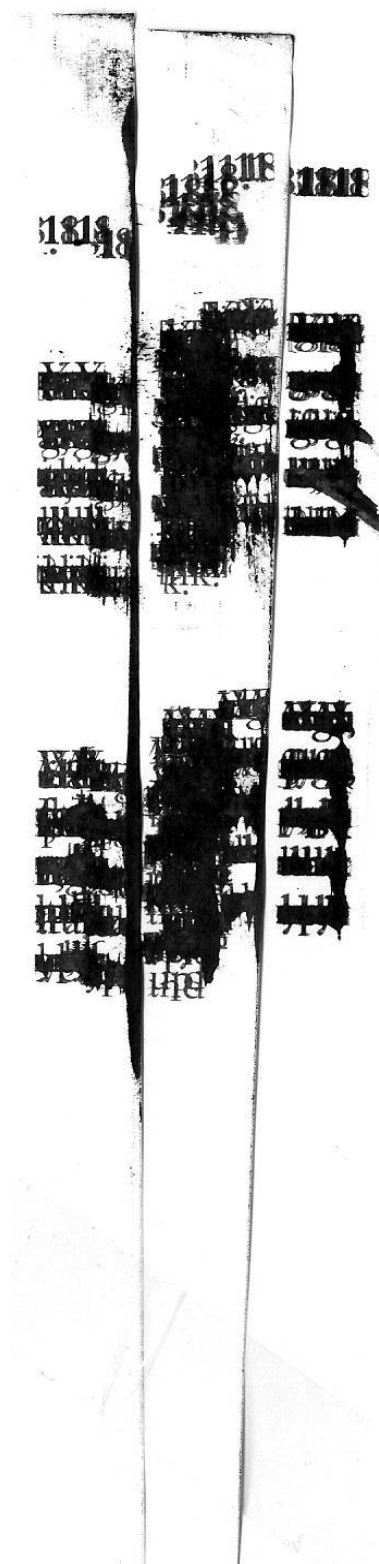


Figure 4: Derek Beaulieu "Trio" (2007)

Chapter Two: Clean

Predating and inspiring the development of Concrete poetry in Canada was the “Clean”²¹ aesthetics of “heroic” international Concrete poetry in the 1950s and 1960s. Concrete poetry, arguably “the first international poetical movement” (Bense “Concrete Poetry I”) of the 20th Century was first theorized (only a few years after the publication of Olson’s “Projective Verse”) by Eugen Gomringer in Germany and the Noigandres Group—Décio Pignatari, Augusto de Campos and Haroldo de Campos—in Brazil.

When coupled with Mary Ellen Solt’s *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968), the manifestos, statements and poetry of Gomringer and the Noigandres Group remain the best examples of Concrete poetry. Their work eschews representation and emotive content in favour of rationality, graphic design and the “tension of thing-words in space-time” (de Campos, Pignatari and de Campos “Pilot Plan”). Solt declares,

the [C]oncrete poet seeks to relieve the poem of its centuries-old burden of ideas, symbolic reference, allusion and repetitious emotional content. (Solt “A World Look”)

Concrete poetry as theorized by Solt, Gomringer and the Niogandres Group, is no longer interested in the “burden” of “repetitious emotional content” (Solt “A World Look”). Poetry can move past the tired declarations of humanist emotion into a form more indicative of how readers actually process language:

²¹ As I’ve discussed in Chapter 1, the “Dirty” and “Clean” categorizations are very much of a Canadian tradition (and are not part of an international discourse), but the distinguishing features of both do make these discriminations useful.

[f]undamentally, it is the realization that the usages of language in poetry of the traditional type are not keeping pace with live processes of language and rapid methods of communication at work in the contemporary world. (Solt “A World Look”)

In Concrete poetry, especially in the work of Eugen Gomringer, Solt sees

[a] move toward “formal simplification,” abbreviated statement on all levels of communication from the headline, the advertising slogan, to the scientific formula—the quick, concentrated visual message, in other words. (Solt “A World Look”)

It is precisely this distancing from traditional poetics that makes Concrete poetry both a marginalized form unrecognizable to many poets and a genre perfectly suited to a 21st Century readership.

Kenneth Goldsmith, founder and curator of *UbuWeb*, argues that for this classic, “heroic,” period of Concrete poetry “readability was the key: like a logo, a poem should be instantly recognizable” as poets endeavored to

render all language into poetic icons, similar to the way that everyone can understand the meaning of a folder icon on the computer screen.

(Goldsmith *Uncreative* 55–57)

For Goldsmith, Concrete poetry presaged the language and formulation of the graphic interfaces of the contemporary Internet and the shift “from command line to graphic icon” (Goldsmith *Uncreative* 57).

Marjorie Perloff, in “Signs are Taken as Wonders: The Billboard Field as Poetic Space” (1990), levels a withering critique of the “utopian” Concrete poetry of the 1950s and 60s, declaring that

it is a question whether such [poems] charming and witty as they are, especially the first time we read/see them, can continue to hold our attention. (Perloff “Signs” 115)

Perloff here grips tightly to traditional definitions of poetry: Poundian formulations that “literature is language charged with meaning,” that “[l]iterature is news that STAYS news” and that a poem must continually plumb the depths of literary offerings which grant the reader reason to repeatedly return to the text (Pound *ABC of Reading* 28–29, original emphasis).

In her introduction to *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Solt pre-empts Perloff’s charges by declaring that to approach Concrete poetry with traditionally poetic expectations is a fallacy for “[t]he Concrete poet is concerned with making an object to be perceived rather than read” and “the content of the Concrete poem is non-literary” (Solt “A World Look”). It is precisely this non-literary content that makes the “Clean” Concrete poem ideal for a 21st Century audience. In “Signs are Taken as Wonders: The Billboard Field as Poetic Space” Perloff expresses concern that

[t]he question remains, however, whether the conflation of Concrete poetry and advertising isn’t a kind of dead end for the former; such texts as “código,” after all, function primarily as recognition symbols: as soon as we see them, we know a particular object [...] is in question because only that particular object has just this (and no other) emblem [....] Indeed, it seems the call for what Eugen Gomringer has characterized as “reduced language,” for “poems ... as easily understood as signs in airports and traffic signs,” runs the risk of

producing “poems” that are airport and traffic signs. (Perloff “Signs” 120)²²

By placing quotation marks around “poem,” Perloff further underlines her doubt that these objects have any right to claim the title of poetry. Perloff seems concerned that Concrete “poems” would end up not only resembling, or being inspired, by “airport and traffic signs” but being replaced by them. I couldn’t disagree more.

The poem, under the theories of Gomringer and Solt, is the result of a “concentration upon the physical material upon which the poem or text is made” (Solt “A World Look”). Solt insists that “[e]motions and ideas are not the physical materials of poetry” and compliments Haroldo de Campos’s “notion of literature not as *craftsmanship* but [...] as an *industrial* process” where the poem is a “prototype” rather than the “typical handiwork of artistic artistry” (de Campos “Informational Temperature” 226, original emphasis). Perloff, under the tutelage of Kenneth Goldsmith, reappraises her position on Gomringer and the Noigandres Group in “From Avant-Garde to Digital: The Legacy of Brazilian Concrete Poetry” (2008). Perloff no longer considers the embrace of way-finding signage and traffic signs as a potential “dead end” for poetry, instead she argues that these poems are more indicative of reading after the Internet (Perloff “From Avant-Garde” 52).

Max Bense argues that Concrete poetry “serves less an understanding of meaning than an understanding of arrangements” (Bense “Concrete poetry I”). In Bense’s estimation, Concrete poetry should focus on the arrangement of letters and

²² To be perfectly fair to Augusto de Campos and “código,” the poem was written to operate *both* as a poetic object and as the logo for the Brazilian poetry magazine *Código*. As I’ll discuss later in this chapter, that dual purpose doesn’t seem problematic to me at all.

material where

headlines, slogans, groups of sounds and letters give rise to forms which could be models for a new poetry just waiting to be taken up for meaningful use. (Gomringer “From Line to Constellation”)

That meaningful use, Goldsmith and Perloff argue, has now arrived.

Solt believes that

if the visual poem is a new product in a world flooded with new products, then it must partake of the nature of the world that created it. (Solt “A World Look”)

Goldsmith and Perloff build upon this arguing that the Concrete poem is ideally suited for a digital milieu. Goldsmith extends Gomringer’s claims, arguing that

[C]oncrete poetry’s [...] claim was that poetry, in order to remain relevant, needed to move from the verse and stanza to the condensed forms of the constellation, cluster, ideogram, and icon. (Goldsmith *Uncreative* 59)

as a means of aligning Concrete poetry with the iconography of the contemporary laptop and the graphic interface of the Internet. Goldsmith draws similarities between the Concrete poet’s attraction to cool, rational typefaces such as Futura and Helvetica and the contemporary spread of Arial and Verdana—“cleanliness, readability, and clarity [...] cool words for a cool environment” (Goldsmith *Uncreative* 59–60).²³ To Goldsmith, early Concrete poetry was a form in search of its environment, only

²³ Luis Fernando Verissimo, in his novel *Borges and the Eternal Orangutans*, has Jorge Luis Borges, a character in the novel state, “No-one can possibly recognize their mother tongue when printed in Futura typeface. It lacks maternal warmth, it lacks friendliness.” (Verissimo 58)

activating once media caught up with Gomringer, Bense and the Noigandres Group's prescient ideas about a flatscreen, utilitarian writing [see Figure 6]. Goldsmith suggests that the reason Concrete poetry of the 1950s and 60s—as typified by Gomringer and the de Campos brothers—has become relevant again is that their poems most closely echo the icons used in contemporary computing—the file-folder icon, the floppy disk save icon—not to mention the cool typography of the Mac platform and icon-driven interface of the iPad.

As I argue in “Transcend, Transcribe, Transfigure, Transform, Transgress” (*Flaunt* 127 “The Fabrication Issue” 80–85), if poetry is going to reclaim even a shred of relevancy for a contemporary audience then poets must become competitive for readership. While graphic design, advertising and contemporary design culture expand to redefine and rewrite how we understand communication, poetry has become ruefully ensconced in the traditional. The McDonald's golden arches, the Nike swoosh and the Apple logo best represent the aims of writers working in this form of poetic discourse.

Beat poet Lew Welch supposedly wrote the North American insect repellent Raid's ubiquitous advertising slogan “Raid kills bugs dead” as a copywriter at Foote, Cone and Belding in 1966—and thus applied Imagist doctrine to the world of advertising. Conceptual poet Vanessa Place argues that

[t]oday we are of an age that understands corporations are people too
and poetry is the stuff of placards. or vice versa. (Place “Poetry is
Dead”)

By proposing poems “as easily understood as signs in airports and traffic signs,” Eugen Gomringer moves poetry away from readability (despite Goldsmith's claims) towards poetic icons (Gomringer “The Poem as a Functional Object”) [see Figure 5].

Both Goldsmith and Perloff discuss Concrete poetry in terms of readability. Goldsmith believes that for Gomringer and the Concrete poets of the 1950s and 60s, “readability was the key” although “like a logo, a poem should be instantly recognizable” (Goldsmith *Uncreative* 55). This conflates two differing approaches to Concrete poetry and its place within a poetic discourse. If Concrete poetry (and perhaps by extension all poetry) is to assert ongoing relevance “readability” cannot continue to be “key.”

In “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry” the Noigandres Group argue that Concrete poetry “appeal[s] to nonverbal communication” where each poem is “an object in and of itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/or [...] subjective feelings” (de Campos, Pignatari and de Campos “Pilot Plan”). These nonverbal objects are in fact closer to logos than texts and refute readability in favour of being “instantly recognizable.” To crib Joyce Kilmer’s overwrought and cliché-driven poem “Trees” (the one saving grace of which is, in my opinion, that it is denigrated by Lex Luther in 1980’s *Superman II*): “I think that I shall never see / A poem lovely as a corporate logo.”

Ironically, Kilmer's "Trees" was originally published in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* two years prior to T.S. Eliot's premiering of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the same magazine. In "The Music of Poetry" Eliot claims that poetry "cannot afford to lose contact with the changing face of common intercourse" hoping to guarantee that poetry retains a connection with "ordinary everyday language that we use and hear" (qtd. in Perloff "Changing" 29). Eliot's plea focuses on the sonic qualities of poetry, certainly, but in the 21st Century, his dictum can be poetically swerved to argue that the best path for poetry is to step back from poetry itself.

Darren Wershler argues that poetry has left the poem much in the same way that Elvis has left the building. Kenneth Goldsmith summarizes Wershler's argument in "The Writer as Meme Machine":

Poetry as we know it—sonnets or free verse on a printed page—feels akin to throwing pottery or weaving quilts, activities that continue in spite of their cultural marginality. But the Internet, with its swift proliferation of memes, is producing more extreme forms of modernism than modernism ever dreamed of. (Goldsmith "The Writer")

Goldsmith continues his argument on the proliferation of online poetic memes but this argument also applies to embracing the poem as poetic logo. Today the Noigandres Group's "thing-word" concept is best understood as the desktop icon, the Facebook "like" button and the corporate logo. If poets are beholden to Eliot's "changing face of common intercourse" then Concrete poetry's embrace of the "instantly recognizable" poetic "thing-word in space-time" reflects today's common textual intercourse.

Johanna Drucker, in *Figuring the Word* argues that

the Brazilians rejected all forms of “expressionism”—lyrical, personal, emotional—in favour of a poetic form which could function as an object in its own right, betraying nothing about the author, nothing of subjective feelings, or individual identity. (Drucker “Experimental / Visual / Concrete” 118)

Declaring poems “objects” with “functions” does suggest way-finding signage but when the vast majority of the language we consume is non-poetic, should poetry not attempt to poetically intervene within these non-traditionally poetic spaces? As Caroline Bayard posits

Gomringer wanted the public to use poems as daily objects, to remove aesthetic distance and replace them with a “utilitarian relationship.”
(Bayard *New Poetics* 21)

In order to contextualize the logo as poem within a poetic discourse, I suggest that Concrete poets working in response to Gomringer and the Noigandres Group situate their work as corporate logos for oneiric businesses [see Figure 7].

*

Since 2005, I have constructed Clean Concrete poems entirely by hand using out-dated technology. Dry-transfer lettering, ubiquitous in graphic design and advertising from the early 1960s to early 1990s, has been relegated to use by artists and hobbyists. At one point a specialized tool with an expensive pricetag, Letraset (the commercial name of the largest producer of dry-transfer lettering) was used in graphic design and technical drafting in order to standardize graphic elements, eliminate the individuality of the artist’s hand and speed up the creative process. With the advent of desk-top design and publishing, the production and use of dry-transfer lettering dropped significantly.

Dry-transfer lettering has the disadvantage of being unforgiving. Once a designer, artist or writer places a letter upon a page or canvas, that letter is permanently affixed and can not be moved or replaced. I construct my poems without the aid of plans or sketches; the work builds gesturally in response to shapes and patterns in the letters themselves. I construct the poems one letter at a time, each placed by hand, a physical embodiment of Allen Ginsberg's dictum extolling "first thought, best thought" (Ginsberg "On Improvised Poetics" 350).²⁴ The resultant poems, if executed with the same care given to projects by the best graphic designers, are logos and slogans for 'pataphysically impossible businesses.

Like logos for the corporate sponsors of Jorge Luis Borges's Library of Babel, these poems use the particles of language to represent and promote goods and corporations just out of reach. These imaginary businesses, and the advertising campaigns that support them, promote a poetic dreamscape of alphabetic strangeness. As these imagined businesses are metaphorical, each logo can become—as Drucker describes the poetry of the Noigandres Group—

creative work which is fully autonomous, self-sufficient, able to exist—not as an interpretation of other objects, and not as a mimetic representation—but as a creation in the fullest sense—original, independant of reference or imitation, meaningful in its own right.
(Drucker "Experimental / Visual / Concrete" 119)

²⁴ See Ginsberg's "Chögyam Trungpa: Introduction to *First Thought, Best Thought*" in *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952–1995* for an exploration of the origin of his slogan, its conjunction with Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's teaching, and its affect on Ginsberg.

These poems, the vast majority of which I leave untitled, are moments of poetic nostalgia for the signposts of a non-existent past. In Chapter One, I referred to Darren Wershler-Henry's discussion of poetic terminology. In the same interview he suggests that contemporary use of the term "Concrete poetry" allows for the "entry of unsanctioned material into the canon through sheer bloody-mindedness" (Beaulieu "A New Medium" 10). My Clean Concrete poetry points back to the poetic concerns of Gomringer and the Noigandres Group in order to complicate the canon and to refer to the possibilities of a dreamt, noncommercial, signage. My poems are not a matter of the Poundian "new," they refold the old, retrieved from a nowhere cultural memory.

Dirty Concrete poetry engages with dead media in order to trouble the formation of meaning and import; to allow for the eruption of inutterable declarations of semantic nothingness. Clean Concrete also recuperates residual media, but with a differing intention. These poems [see Figure 8] are fitfully nostalgic for an ethereal, ephemeral moment. In our dreams, the resolution of the landscapes has a limit—much of what our mind establishes as the backdrop for our oneiric antics is only as clear as required. These poems are the streetsigns, the signage, the advertising logos for the shops and corporations which are just beyond reach. They are not islands of meaning—semantic or corporate.

Like Gomringer, I believe that Concrete poems should be as easily understood as airport signs, but instead of pointing the reader to the toilet, the directions they impart are spurious if not completely useless. Concrete poems need to be cognizant not of *readability* but of *lookability*. Airport signage is not designed with readability as a primary concern. They are designed for instant and momentary recognition and comprehension as ultimate goals. Viewers need not read, they only need momentarily stare:

the most representative (and perhaps even the most exciting) art form of our age is the advertising logo. Why not create a logo advertising modern poetry, modern art? (Clüver qtd. in Perloff “Signs Taken as Wonders” 119)

Clean Concrete poems refuse linearity in favour of the momentary. Wayfinding signage is designed to be easily understood in a moment, it operates without the need to read. It only requires consumption. Designed to be smoothly digested and transparently communicative, wayfinding signage and traffic signs work extra-linguistically. Goldsmith refers to Gomringer’s efforts as an

utopian agenda of [...] transnational, panlinguistic [...] writing that anyone—regardless of where they lived or what their mother tongue was—could understand. Think of it as a graphic Esperanto, taking language and rendering it as symbols and icons. (Goldsmith *Uncreative* 54)

As Goldsmith notes, Gomringer’s utopian aspirations didn’t pan out, but the idea of a poetic form outside of language continues to resonate. Instead of leaving logos and slogans to the world of graphic design, poets are better served to craft work which is responsive to a new reading milieu. These poems perform a poetic intercession into the language of signage and complicate the need to “panlinguistically” communicate in favour of co-opting the discourse and the form of the plastic advertising logo.

*

I just want to say one word to you. Just one word.

Yes, sir.

Are you listening?

Yes, I am.

Plastics.

Exactly how do you mean?

—*The Graduate* (1967)

Dry-transfer lettering—and thus the poems constructed from it—consists of a thin sheen of plastic. Christian Bök, in his 2002 manifesto “Virtually Nontoxic,” interrogatively argues that plastic has become the perfect medium for poetic discourse:

[h]as not language itself begun to absorb the synthetic qualities of such a modern milieu, becoming a fabricated, but disposable, convenience, no less pollutant than a Styrofoam container? Has not the act of writing simply become another chemically engineered experience, in which we manufacture a complex polymer by stringing together syllables instead of molecules? The words of our lexicon have become so standardized that they now resemble a limited array of connectible parts [...] and the rules of our grammar have become so rationalized that they now resemble a bounded range of recombinant modes [....] We see language marketed as an infantile commodity—a toy suitable for kids of all ages, because its plastic coating makes it safe to own and easy to use. (Bök “Virtually”)

Canadian sculptor James Carl’s *Content 1.0* (2002) takes this idea to its extreme. With *Content 1.0*, Carl creates a new typeface which replaces all alphanumeric characters with images of recycleable plastic bottles of home-cleaning products [see Figure 9]. Every letter and number has been replaced by an insignificant, inconsequential, line-drawn image of a disposable container or lid. This incomplete inventory, seduced by the shapes and forms of plastic packaging, reduces language to a series of products—

each of which points to an anonymous manufacturer. Carl's font, while not strictly Concrete poetry, embraces Mary Ellen Solt's declaration that

if the visual poem is a new product in a world flooded with new products, then it must partake of the nature of the world that created it.

(Solt "A World Look")

My letraset poems, like Carl's typeface, render the particles of language into "Content 1.0," a new content that uncannily resembles the letters we already have, but form logos which promote empty storefronts and boarded-up retailers, their signs scrubbed to the point of illegibility. In these oneiric logos letters combine, like so many pieces of orphaned Lego, to form previously unexpected constructions not at all resembling the images on the packaging.

In the age of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, poetry must embrace plasticity in order to remain relevant. Plastic and vinyl perfectly embody the poetic possibilities for language. As Bök argues, the recombinant possibilities of plastic (especially recycled plastic) are the ideal metaphor for poetry. John Bevis, in "Vinyl: material location placement," provides a useful history of the creation and refinement of vinyl (Polyvinyl Chloride or PVC) from its creation in 1838 to its commercialization by Waldo Semen of BF Goodrich in 1926. While this history may seem marginal to the history and development of Concrete poetry, it does align with contemporary concerns. The commercialization of plastic in the 1920s and its ubiquity by the 1950s coincides with the rise of Concrete poetry from its Dada beginnings during World War One through the post-World War Two rise of global corporatism. Plastic is not only indicative of rising consumerism but also of the post-consumer need for recycling, reformatting, reusing and recasting, all of which are 'pataphysically

foreshadowed in Concrete's early manifestos (and later in the statements and manifestos of Conceptual writing which will be discussed in Chapter 3).

Bök's declaration of the poetic implications of plastic is echoed by Roland Barthes's "Plastic," a brief essay which entreats for the artistic potential of "ubiquity made visible" (Barthes "Plastic" 97). Barthes's comments on plastic are germane to a discussion of Concrete poetry, especially Concrete poetry made with PVC dry-transfer lettering. Concrete poetry, like plastic is

a "shaped" substance: whatever its final state, [it] keeps a flocculent appearance, something opaque, creamy and curdled, something powerless. (Barthes "Plastic" 98)

Poetry no longer retains the cultural caché that it once held. Like plastic, poetry in the hierarchy of the major poetic substances [...] figures as a disgraced material. (Barthes "Plastic" 98)

Complementing Solt and Gomringer, Barthes argues that plastic (read "poetry") "belong[s] to the world of appearances, not to that of actual use" (Barthes "Plastic" 98).

*

PVC / vinyl is created from a combination of hydrocarbon byproducts and Chlorine. I have lived in Calgary, Alberta for over 35 years, having moved here as a young child, and it seems only appropriate that I would choose to poetically investigate a medium produced as a product of oil and gas exploration. Calgary's economy is driven by the problematic revenue of non-renewable resource exploitation and increasingly by the notorious northern Albertan oil sands. Calgary—with an estimated population of 1.2 million—popularly represents itself through its rural ties,

by oil and gas revenue and by right-wing politics. Alberta defines itself not in terms of cultural growth but in terms of economic growth.²⁵

As I discussed in Chapter 1, to be an artist or arts worker in Calgary means to engage with the culture and economics of oil and gas exploitation. Concrete poetry created with dry-transfer lettering—PVC suspended on inert backing paper—actively embraces marketability and the technology of waste:

[p]lastics have been seen, notwithstanding developments in recycling technology, as the one-way conversion of natural resources into mountains of waste. (Bevis “Vinyl”)

Both Gomringer and the Noigandres Group embrace advertising and graphic design—the logo-ization of language—as necessary and inevitable in order for poetry to prove its relevance to a contemporary audience. Bevis argues both that plastic “adds quality while reducing skill, enriches and cheapens” but “[w]e couldn’t be modern without them” (Bevis “Vinyl”). Concrete poems, like plastic, are “the very spectacle of [their] end-products” (Barthes “Plastic” 97); the spectacle of a logo, operating normally, but promoting an empty product. The material of poetry, here, “is wholly subsumed in the fact of being used” (Barthes “Plastic” 99) while ignoring the need to be poetic.

²⁵ The Government of Alberta’s investment in the arts is \$18 per capita—far behind Newfoundland and Labrador (\$27) and Quebec (\$25) although significantly higher than British Columbia (\$5 per capita) (“Provincial Government Spending”). The provincial Heritage Fund—built from taxation on oil and gas revenue now stands at over \$16.6 billion (*Heritage Fund*)—is kept in reserve, while the provincial debt and deficit have been completely eliminated. Alberta’s government has recently built upon that record by reducing the provincial arts budget from \$70 million in 2006 to \$58 million in 2013 (“Alberta Culture’s 2013–14 Budget”).

Concrete poetry, like plastic, contains a “reverie [...] at the sight of the proliferating forms of matter” (Barthes “Plastic” 97).

*

The circulation of poetry is problematized when confronted with the publishing requirements of the majority of literary magazines and journals. Most literary magazines in Canada request that contributors grant “First North American Serial Rights;”²⁶ an agreement that all work accepted has not appeared elsewhere in the North American market. This request restricts poems to an ephemeral moment of epiphanic truth. Requiring poems to appear only once (before potential book publication) limits poetry to unique missives from the poet directly to the reader, conveyed within a temporary framework: these poems were written for *you, now*. I ignore these requests. Much to some editors’s and colleagues’s chagrin, I actively pursue placing my Concrete poetry in recurring and overlapping venues. Restricting publication to a single venue limits audience to a lone, ephemeral space—and does not allow for the proliferation of poetry into other discourses. I have published my Concrete poems as 1" buttons, t-shirts, broadsides, chapbooks, through both poetry and illustration submissions and projected on the sides of buildings (most notably on the side of Calgary’s 191-metre tall concrete spire the Calgary Tower), often at the same time.

²⁶ See, for instance, the “Privacy Policy” of Calgary’s *filling Station* magazine:

filling Station reserves First North American Serial Rights. This means we get to publish the work we have received from contributors first in magazine form, and this also extends to our Digital Edition through Zinio / Magazines Canada, this website, and *filling Station*’s social media presence. (*filling Station* “Privacy”)

This open refutation of publishing norms asserts that poetry is most affective when it works within another discourse. My Concrete poems are designed to be received as logos for empty products. As logos, these poetic emblems are synonymous with, and indistinguishable from, branding and trademarks. de Campos's "código" [see Figure 5] and my emblematic Concrete poems [as typified by the untitled work included here as Figure 7] are designed to be as ubiquitous as Nike's swoosh or Starbucks's twin-tailed mermaid.²⁷ The swoosh and the mermaid are meant to saturate, they move without resistance from billboards and products to print ads and television spots without tension. Poems, on the other hand, due to their very medium, have restrictions placed upon their appearance. Editors and poets, it would

²⁷ In the back-cover promotional endorsement for *Kern* (Los Angeles: Les Figues Press, 2014), Marjorie Perloff writes:

The detritus of signage is all around us. Wherever we look we see signs telling us where to go, what to do, how much it will cost. The 78 poems in Derek Beaulieu's riveting new collection begin by resembling the signs, logos, and slogans of everyday life—and then become more and more unreadable. No two of these constellations—made individually by hand using dry-transfer lettering (letraset)—are alike; each promises something it cannot quite fulfill, as readability, having failed, gives way to lookability. So suggestive are these images that we cannot stop looking, trying to decipher, to arrest the flow. For the *Kern* poems present moments of poetic nostalgia for the signposts of a past that never fully existed. Rejecting our advances, they say to the reader/viewer: catch me if you can! And in the meantime, enjoy the promise of each moment: it won't let you down. (Perloff *untitled*)

seem, are the people most invested in preventing poetry's potential cultural inundation.

Concrete poems are written with an eye for adaptability and reproducibility at differing scales—from magazines and books to computer monitors and handheld devices—without being confused for any other brand. Limiting publication through the assertion of “First North American Serial Rights” interferes with Concrete poetry's ability to operate outside of the traditional poetic discourse. Concrete poetry was theorized to work within another space, to abandon the page in favour of emblems, sandwich boards and signposts. It flourishes only when allowed to operate within its intended milieu.

*

Contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing's *Book From the Ground: from point to point* (2013)—a novel told entirely through icons, logos, emoticons and wayfaring signage—fully embraces the Noigandres Group's proposition of a utopian poetics and artistically interrogates transnational marketing and global vernacular communication (Bing “Regarding” 40) [see Figure 10]. The Noigandres Group's postulation that poetry should aspire to airport signage is fully realized in *Book From the Ground: from point to point*. In an uncanny echoing of Gomringer and the Noigandres Group, Xu Bing argues that “the design of airport signs and airline safety manuals is based upon image recognition” and that “traditional spoken forms are no longer the most appropriate method for communication” which are best replaced by “image reading” (Bing “Regarding” 38–40). Bing argues, sixty years after the rise of “heroic” Concrete poetry, that

anything aimed at a global audience today must make use of a quick and effective mode of recognition and dissemination
(Bing “Regarding” 43)

and that “the success of a language is in large part dependent on the power of its [...] economic force” (Bing “Regarding” 43–44). In an economy of objects and a readership of logos, in order to best reach Eliot’s “changing face of common intercourse,” Bing argues that authors must use a literature that consists of

logos that employ clearly identifiable characteristics [...] marketed in the direction of wordlessness. (Bing “Regarding” 43).

*

As I continue my exploration of the glyphic nature of Concrete poetry, I expanded my dry-transfer lettering pieces from small poetic logos to larger compositional fields [see Figure 8 for example]. It would be easy to contextualize this work, once again, within an Olsonian field composition but I would rather gaze at these pieces under the neon sheen of the Tokyo skyline. No longer bound by the page, Concrete poetry now fully embraces the plasticized space of graphics and glyphs, pixels and projections.

With *Prose of the Trans-Canada* (Bookthug, 2011) I situate Concrete poetry within a history of artists’s books and the avant-garde. Constructed as a response to Blaise Cendrars’s 1913 *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (“Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jehanne of France”), *Prose of the Trans-Canada* seeks to expand the scale of Concrete poetry past the manuscript (or

magazine) page to the larger concerns of the canvas while still working within the discourse.²⁸

Cendrars's *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (hereafter *Prose of the Trans-Siberian*) is a "a sad poem printed on sunlight" (qtd. in Michaelides) created in collaboration with Sonia Delaunay-Terk. Each Technicolor copy of *Prose of the Trans-Siberian* is an accordion-fold, codex-challenging, "book" which, when unfolded, measures 16" × 72". With a proposed edition of 150 copies, *Prose of the Trans-Siberian*'s prodigious length was such that every copy placed end-to-end would equal the height of the Eiffel Tower, the symbol of Parisian modernity (despite Guy de Maupassant's dietary habits). Unsurprisingly for a book with such a radical design, there were ultimately only approximately sixty copies of *Prose of the Trans-Siberian* produced (of which only around thirty survive).²⁹

Prose of the Trans-Canada playfully responds to Cendrars's legacy in a 16" × 52" Concrete poem. Produced as a scroll instead of an accordion-fold book, when all 150 copies of this limited edition are placed end-to-end, the resultant length is the same as the symbol of Calgarian modernity, the Calgary Tower. Like Cendrars's original, while the intended edition of *Prose of the Trans-Canada* is 150 copies, it has been published print-on-demand and is unlikely to ever reach its intended print-run. Due to the poem's length, Toronto small-press publisher Bookthug (who took on this

²⁸ Gary Barwin's "derek beaulieu's *Prose of the Trans-Canada*: A 1:1 scale road map of language," a playful, poetic exploration of *Prose of the Trans-Canada*, is online at *Jacket2* and includes a brief interview with me about the piece's construction.

²⁹ See Jerome Rothenberg and Steven Clay's *A Book of the Book* for a full-colour (albeit reduced) reproduction of *Prose of the Trans-Siberian*, an English translation, and a history of Cendrars and Delaunay-Terk's collaboration.

project when it was rejected by several other publishers for being impractical, if not impossible, to produce) ultimately printed the 52" scroll on matte polypro film, the same plasticized vellum used by architects and oil-field refinery designers for blueprints and schematics.

Cendrars's *Prose of the Trans-Siberian* notoriously uses 12 different typefaces in its poetic recounting of a troubled journey across the Russian countryside. Highly unusual for the time, Cendrars's typefaces temporally align his work with Futurism and Dada's embrace of commercial design, advertising fonts and display faces in an attempt to embody a corporate landscape. Like Cendrars's efforts to graphically present the material forms of his poetic evocation, *Prose of the Trans-Canada* embraces a torrent of typefaces, flooding across an unending field of half-formed logos and proto-glyphs that blend in to a single panel of undifferentiated language material.

Prose of the Trans-Canada was ultimately projected nightly on the side of the Calgary Tower as part of Wordfest 2011, an international literary festival focusing on emergent and established authors. Phallicly erected in the centre of Calgary's downtown core, the Calgary Tower (once known as the Husky Tower, its original name revealing the primary funder of the tower's construction: Husky Oil and Refining Ltd.) has become a symbol of Calgary's reliance on oil and gas and its dedication to growth and expansion (the tower ostentatiously features a natural-gas fired cauldron on its tip as placed by Canadian Western Natural Gas and lit in nostalgic celebration of Calgary's hosting of the 1988 Winter Olympics).

Constructed using PVC lettering, *Prose of the Trans-Canada* was published on plasticized vellum and ultimately projected upon the most recognizable symbol of Albertan dedication to the exploitation of non-renewable resources. Like James Carl's

Content 1.0, Prose of the Trans-Canada is a celebration of a plasticized poetic; letters are pelletized, melted, poured and reformed from one undifferentiated lump into another. *Prose of the Trans-Canada* features no identifying words, only the smallest pieces of language repackaged as a flowing panel of glyphic remnants. The detritus of advertising swept up, flattened and projected on the side of Calgary's most iconic building.

Not surprisingly, given poetry's—and especially Concrete poetry's—cultural purview, the projection of *Prose of the Trans-Canada* on the side of the Calgary Tower was met by complete cultural indifference. No one in the popular or cultural media discussed the projection nor the intervention of a poetic object in to commercial space. Despite the Calgary Tower's location at the intersection of two prominent, high-traffic, streets (7th Avenue SW and Centre Street S) and prominence in the Calgarian skyline, the poem, ironically, did exactly what Gomringer expected for Concrete in general. By projecting *Prose of the Trans-Canada* on the side of the Calgary Tower, the poem ceased to operate as poetic, it became the object of its own critique—it became an indistinguished logo.³⁰

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that Concrete poetry's formulation of a non-literary space made it perfectly suited for a 21st Century audience. Perloff's fears that

the call for what Eugen Gomringer has characterized as “reduced language,” for “poems ... as easily understood as signs in airports and

³⁰ The projection was restaged in April 2014 when I was named Calgary's Poet Laureate. This 2-year position is honorific, ambassadorial and facilitative. In addition to readings, workshops and events, my major focus is the creation of a city-wide program through which selected alleys in Calgary will be named after figures from the city's literary past.

traffic signs,” runs the risk of producing “poems” that are airport and traffic signs (Perloff “Signs” 120)

are not to be taken lightly, for in the display and projection of *Prose of the Trans-Canada* they came to pass. But that’s not surprising.

Reading has shifted from something that takes place over time (a concentrated investment occurring privately, i.e.: single readers quietly reading single books) to something that takes place instantaneously (a brief moment occurring publicly, i.e.: momentary scans of logos, headlines and brand-recognition). Moving *Prose of the Trans-Canada* from a literary space (the published edition) to a commercial space (the side of a public building) guaranteed that it would no longer garner attention within literary circles. It simply washed over readers in the same way as any other billboard, logo or corporate slogan. Comfortable and unnoticed. Another piece of reassuring plastic.³¹

³¹ In the autumn of 2014 I was commissioned, again by Wordfest, to create a pair of visual poems that are to be exhibited on billboards on MacLeod Trail and Deerfoot Trail, two of Calgary’s busiest thoroughfares. Thousands of drivers a day will be exposed to the work; I am expecting a similar response to that of the *Prose of the Trans-Canada* projection.



Figure 5: Augusto de Campos “código” (1973)

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Figure 6: Eugen Gomringer “Constellation” (1953)



Figure 7: Derek Beaulieu “untitled” (2008)



Figure 8: Derek Beaulieu “untitled” (2010)

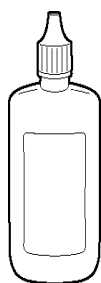


Figure 9: James Carl *Content 1.0* (2002) [excerpt]



Figure 10: Xu Bing *The Book from the Ground: from point to point* (2013) [excerpt]

Chapter Three: Conceptual

Conceptual Writing, Kenneth Goldsmith claims, is the only truly international form of writing since the founding of Concrete Poetry (Boon “Kenneth Goldsmith”).

Conceptual writing, Goldsmith continues,

[e]mploys intentionally self and ego effacing tactics using uncreativity, unoriginality, illegibility, appropriation, plagiarism, fraud, theft, and falsification as its precepts; information management, word processing, databasing, and extreme process as its methodologies; and boredom, valuelessness, and nutritionlessness as its ethos. (Goldsmith “A Week” 139)

Within these precepts, Concrete poetry, as formulated in the 1950s, would not seem to have much in common with Conceptual Writing, as formulated in the late 20th Century. Concrete Poetry’s classical phase, as discussed in Chapter Two, interrogates how poets present the reader/viewer with a negotiated path through corporatized language. With Conceptual Writing, poets assert themselves not through declarations of voice and emotion, but through information strategies:

[f]aced with an unprecedented amount of available text, the problem is not needing to write more of it; instead we must learn how to negotiate the vast quantity that exists. How I make my way through this thicket of language—how I manage it, how I parse it, how I organize and distribute it—is what distinguishes my writing from yours. (Goldsmith *Uncreative* 1)

Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Writing are, in fact, entwined around the issue of negotiating that “thicket of language,” reframing our language back to us, only

slightly askew. Conceptual Writing, like Concrete Poetry, embraces the plastic:

[l]anguage as material, language as process, language as something to be shoveled in to a machine and spread across pages, only to be discarded and recycled once again. (Goldsmith “A Week” 139)

Instead of Pound’s “MAKE IT NEW,”³² Conceptual writers—as typified by Goldsmith, Bök, Wershler, Dworkin, Place, Robert Fitterman, Simon Morris, Nick Thurston and myself³³—more often look to Land artist Robert Smithson, Conceptual artist Sol LeWitt and Pop artists Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns for their rallying slogans. Johns’s instruction to

[t]ake an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it. Do something else to it (qtd. in Perloff “Unoriginal Genius: An Introduction” 17)

cannily reflects Conceptual writing and its response to the contemporary bulk of language.

Unlike Concrete poets, there are few Conceptual Writers who engage with the non-semantic, visual implications of language. Most look at what Robert Smithson in 1966 referred to as the “heap of language”³⁴ and focus on the words themselves with little consideration for the page’s graphic potential. With *flatland: a romance of many*

³² In Pound’s “Canto LIII” (original emphasis), although now as much a slogan as “Just do it” or Lew Welch’s poetic slogan for Raid.

³³ And an increasing number of others, as exemplified by *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (edited by Kenneth Goldsmith and Craig Dworkin, Northwestern University Press, 2011).

³⁴ See Smithson’s *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Ed. Jack Flam. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

dimensions (information as material 2007; UBUWeb 2010) and *Local Colour* (ntamo, 2008; Eclipse 2011) I focus not on semantic content but on the physical arrangement of source texts embodying Smithson's "[I]anguage to be looked at and/or things to be read" (Smithson "Language" 61).

flatland: a romance of many dimensions [see Figure 10] is a page-by-page translation of Edwin Abbott Abbott's 1884 novel of the same name.³⁵ Abbott's novel is an allegorical critique of the British class system and the lack of education for

³⁵ Of my translation of *flatland*, Canadian poet and critic Gregory Betts writes:

Beaulieu's work participates in the tradition of visual poetry that grows from [Stéphane] Mallarmé's idealist sense of the libratory and revolutionary potential by physically breaking language open and uncovering a dormant purity. Some today might be tempted to mistakenly call this Romanticism, though it could be characterized as romantic. Indeed, Beaulieu confesses a romanticism, an idealist significance, of a similar nature in a paratextual element I have not already mentioned—on the cover even, in the subtitle. For here he himself, by including Abbott's original subtitle, characterizes the book as "a romance of many dimensions." This romance transcends the satirical aspects of the work (as well as the swindle) by pointing a way out and through the conservatism that binds us to a flat earth and to straight lines. Beaulieu's unreadable book synthesizes Abbott's satirical use of space with Mallarmé's idealistic rupture of space. It embodies its own romance of the crisis of form. (Betts "Gregory Betts")

women in the late 19th Century.³⁶ It has remained in print for over a century and recounts the tale of “A.Square,” a conscious two-dimensional quadrangle who inhabits “Flatland,” a two-dimensional world occupied entirely by polygons. A.Square is visited by a sphere, a denizen of a three-dimensional world who presents the blasphemous doctrine of higher dimensions. The sphere squires A.Square on a Dickensian tour of a series of different worlds including the “Pointland,” “Lineland,” “Flatland” and “Spaceland” and theorizes of fourth- and fifth-dimensional planes of existence. My translation applies the cold logic of Flatland’s denizens and a proceduralism that openly embraces Conceptualism.

With “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (1967) Conceptual artist Sol LeWitt postulates a new “grammar” for construction. “Form,” says LeWitt, is “of very limited importance” in terms of itself, but it becomes the “grammar for the total work” (LeWitt “Paragraphs”). LeWitt argues that Conceptual art requires that “the basic unit be deliberately uninteresting” as to allow the form to be merely a unit for composition:

[t]o work with a plan that is preset is one way of avoiding subjectivity. It also obviates the necessity of designing each work in turn. The plan would design the work. [...T]he artist [should] select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution of the problem. After that the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work, the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible. (LeWitt “Paragraphs”)

³⁶ Abbott’s *Flatland* is in the common domain and is available both in numerous print editions and online including a scan of the first edition at *Internet Archive*:

<https://archive.org/details/flatlandromanceo00abbouoft>

With “Sentences on Conceptual Art” (1969) LeWitt postulates, in 35 numbered statements, a new means for production that removes the artist’s subjectivity, replacing it with a dedication to process:

27. The concept of a work of art may involve the matter of the piece or the process in which it is made.

28. Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist’s mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly. There are many side effects that the artist cannot imagine. These may be used as ideas for new works.

29. The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course. (LeWitt “Sentences”)

My translation of *flatland: a romance of many dimensions* (as published by York’s information as material press and now available digitally through UBUWeb), applies LeWitt’s procedurality to reading and mapping. Over a year I mapped the occurrence of each unique letter on the first line of each page of the 1991 Princeton University Press edition of Abbott’s *Flatland*. As Marjorie Perloff writes in the afterword to *flatland*:³⁷

On the very last page of the novella, the original reads,

That is the hope of my brighter moments. Alas, it is not always.

Deleting the duplicate letters results in:

Tha is e op f my br g r n l w

³⁷ These quotations, and those below from *Local Colour* and Paul Auster’s *Ghosts*, rely on fixed-width typeface in order to sufficiently represent the geography of the page layout. While this dissertation is typeset in 12-point Times New Roman, these select quotations are in 8-point Courier.

Beaulieu then draws a line from the 1st appearance of the *T* on the 1st line of text to its appearance on the second line, the third line, and so on to the end of the textblock. And so on, following that initial *h*, *a*, and so on. It is, undoubtedly, a labour-intensive exercise [...] But, what [...] is the point? (Perloff “Afterword” 107–108)

The “point” is, as LeWitt theorizes, to establish a procedural reading practice and to follow that reading practice mechanically though the entirety of a single volume. I was dedicated to LeWitt’s advice that

[o]nce the idea of the piece is established in the artist's mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly

and “[t]he process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course” (LeWitt “Sentences”). The process for creating *flatland*, by hand, with light-table, onionskin paper, ruler and pen, resulted in a series of diagrams that contain no repetition and no discernable information; they are purely “an exercise in sameness and difference” (Perloff “Afterword” 109).³⁸

Reading, with *flatland*, is not a matter of gathering information, gaining knowledge or amusement; it is the graphing and charting of progress though a temporal object,

[*r*]eading, in this context, means to look closely at what is in front of

³⁸ In “Visual Poetics 02” Christian Bök explains that *flatland* draws

attention to the proprioception of our roving gazes as they leap from letter to letter—and in doing so [Beaulieu] has repeated in verse what the modern artist has already done in paint, abolishing the depth of field in order to foreground the flatness of a pictorial viewscape. (Bök “Visual”)

you, so that you become familiar with the circuit of differentials presented. (Perloff “Afterword” 109, original emphasis)

In constructing *flatland* my role was more of draftsman (echoing my previous employment, once again) than writer. My role was not to apply *creative* inspiration but to employ *uncreative* solutions:

[t]he draftsman and the wall enter a dialogue. The draftsman becomes bored but later through this meaningless activity finds peace or misery. (LeWitt qtd. in Goldsmith *Uncreative* 134)

With each radically different page, *flatland* unfurls EKGs of the appearances of letters, pulsating stock reports that offer nothing to the potential investor. *flatland* is coldly unreadable, occupied with charting appearance and

[n]ot with conveying information or making meanings in the usual way, but with the relationship of an Oulippean constraint to *difference*—to the non-identity of nominals Duchamp called the *infra-thin*. (Perloff “Afterword” 108)

Foregrounding statistical analysis and diagramming over semantic content, *flatland* is “[c]older and more clinical than Dworkin, and minus the sensuality of Stein,” a “completely unreadable work, yet one based entirely on language” (Goldsmith *Uncreative* 170).

*

Local Colour (ntamo, 2008; Eclipse 2010) built upon my explorations of the combining of Concrete poetry and Conceptual writing. *flatland: a romance of many dimensions* is a black and white charting of alphabetic occurrence, applying an awareness of the flatness of the page to the description of the fictional “Flatland.” With *Local Colour* I apply similar reading techniques to Paul Auster’s 1986 novella

Ghosts [see Figure 11]. Written as the second installment of *The New York Trilogy* (*City of Glass*, 1985; *Ghosts*, 1986; *The Locked Room*, 1986), *Ghosts* concerns the exploits of Blue, a private detective who becomes embroiled in the exploits and interaction between White and Black and the challenges of writing a novel. As *Ghosts* unfolds and Blue becomes more aware of the case for which he has been hired, the novel becomes increasingly obsessive and trapped within a vocabulary of proper names,

First of all there is Blue. Later there is White, and then there is Black, and before the beginning there is Brown. Brown broke him in, Brown taught him the ropes, and when Brown grew old Blue took over. That is how it begins. (Auster *Ghosts* 7)

Local Colour is the result of a strict, constrained, reading of *Ghosts* based not on plot, character-development or a readerly urge to solve the mystery of the novel, but rather, like *flatland*, on the occurrence of words—as material objects—on the page. Auster's *Ghosts* is as preoccupied with the clockwork machinations of detective fiction as it is with the evocation of the streets and locales of Brooklyn Heights and Manhattan (with ongoing references to Walt Whitman's previous residence on Orange Street).³⁹ *Local Colour* coolly applies Auster's logic to the text itself. Once again, reading is a cartographic feat; *Local Colour* maps the location of each chromatic word in *Ghosts*. As an example, isolating only the colour words from the open paragraph of *Ghosts* (above), the text reads:

³⁹ The passage in *Ghosts* that gives *Local Colour* its title reads:

Walt Whitman handset the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* on this street in 1855, and it was here that Henry Ward Beecher railed against slavery from the pulpit of the red-brick church. So much for local color. (Auster *Ghosts* 9–10)

	Blue	White	
Black		Brown Brown	
Brown		Brown	Blue

(Beaulieu *Local Colour* 1)

Reading within this constraint results in a text that abandons the purely descriptive, plot-driven, narratives dependent on representation, dialogue and all the hallmarks of traditional prose. What remains are words treated as widgets and ciphers, glowing linguistic pixels that represent the “local color” (Auster *Ghosts* 10) which haunt, like ghosts, the novel from behind the cathode ray tubes of narrative. Upon excising *Ghosts* of all non-chromatic text, I replaced the remaining words with polygons that visually represent the semantic content of each word. *Local Colour* is a novel without words, yet one that translates and transforms—geographically and semantically—the content of Auster’s *Ghosts* into another form. *Local Colour* is a novel emptied of all the signals of a novel, dusted with isolated pixels still broadcasting in to the void.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Chris Ewart reviews both *Flatland* and *Local Colour* online in *Poetic Front*, a peer-reviewed journal located at Vancouver’s Simon Fraser University. In the review he reproduces the letter I received from Paul Auster’s office upon sending a copy of the published edition of *Local Colour*:

Dear Derek,

I am writing on behalf of Paul Auster, who received your book *Local Colour*. He wanted to tell you how impressed, befuddled, amazed and, finally, deeply moved he was by your work. He sends you all the best thoughts and wishes you good luck and more exciting projects in the future.

Thank you, Jen

Jen Dougherty, Assistant to Paul Auster

*

Local Colour was originally published through Finnish critic Leevi Lehto's ntamo press in 2008. Once that edition lapsed out of print it was re-issued online as a downloadable PDF through American critic Craig Dworkin's Eclipse in 2010. This digital reissue has fostered a readership that was simply unrealizable with the print edition.

I tell my creative writing students at the Alberta College of Art + Design that the best means of promoting their work is to participate within a network of distribution that can seem counter-intuitive. They should give their work away. Using an extended metaphor, I describe publishing practices and assertions of copyright as being akin to contemporary zoos. Throughout the world zoos are struggling to maintain attendance rates which allow economic sustainability. Zoos require that visitors come to them, pay a fee and view the animals from a safe distance. The animals are kept behind bars (figurative or literal) and are out of contact; they are mere displays. I playfully propose that in order for zoos (and, by metaphorical extension, authors) to assert a new relevance they should release a breeding pair of underfed animals upon the general populace once a month. Each month this breeding pair would wreak havoc on the city. The population would want to learn everything they could about the rampaging animals. The animals meanwhile would devour passersby, breed and evolve unexpectedly. These animals would be joined by other competitive—and equally aggressive—members of the evolutionary food chain (a pride of lions and a dale of hippopotami for example). In other courses, my students are taught to “professionalize,” to build marketability, and to treat their work with a sense of exclusivity. I completely disagree. By treating their work like my metaphorical zoos, they will allow their art to metastasize in unpredictable and

exciting means, interacting with the digital landscape in ways that are truly contemporary. With these releases in to the contemporary ‘wild,’ zoos and zookeepers would be a radically new, and slightly dangerous, resource. The best way of creating an audience for contemporary poetics is to release work online, giving the audience unfettered access to the text’s future.⁴¹

Local Colour exemplifies this stance.⁴² Only once I released *Local Colour* online did it truly begin to embody its potentiality as a conceptually collaborative text. In 2012, Ola Ståhl and Carl Lindh (Malmö, Sweden) reissued *Local Colour* through their Publication Studio Malmö / In Edit Mode Press. Produced in an edition of 200 copies,⁴³ *Local Colour: Ghosts, Variations* treats *Local Colour* as the initiating point

⁴¹ I have been honoured to receive several awards in recognition for my teaching. For both the 2012–2013 and 2013–2014 academic years I was the recipient of the Alberta College of Art + Design Student Association (ACADSA) *Student Appreciation Award* from the student body. In 2012–2013 I was awarded the Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD) *Teaching Excellence Award* from my professional colleagues. In 2013–2014 I was also awarded the Canadian Creative Writers and Writing Programs (CCWWP) *Robert Kroetsch Teaching Innovation Award*.

⁴² In addition to *flatland* (available as a free PDF at UBUWeb) and *Local Colour* (available as a free PDF at Eclipse) I have also released digital editions of *Seen of the Crime* (Snare Books, 2011; UBUWeb, 2012) and *26 Alphabets for Sol LeWitt* (No Press, 2009). Other editions are not online as I have been unable to convince (short-sighted) publishers that this position is to their benefit.

⁴³ Like *Prose of the Trans-Canada*, *Local Colour: Ghosts, Variations* is unlikely to ever sell its entire print run. It remains paradoxically both readily available and extremely scarce.

for a series of rewritings, collaborations, reinterpretations and creative feedback that explore

[t]he tension [...] between the textual narrative and the graphical mark, and the opening it seems to provide toward a realm of intermediality and experimentation. (Ståhl “Introduction”)

Local Colour: Ghosts, Variations is a collection of unbound folios, perfect-bound miniature books, leaflets and compact discs. Gathered with a printed paper band (itself also a response to the source text), *Local Colour: Ghosts, Variations* includes a new edition of *Local Colour* and responses by seventeen international authors, poets and sound artists.⁴⁴ *Local Colour*—in the Publication Studio Malmö / In Edit Mode Press edition—is a permissive node which allows the generation of further interpretations and an international discussion of the potentiality of conceptual writing. Editor Ola Ståhl states that he was most intrigued by

⁴⁴ *Local Colour: Ghosts, Variations* includes print-based responses by Steve Giasson (Québec), Martin Glaz Serup (Denmark), Jörgen Gassilewski (Sweden), Craig Dworkin (USA), Peder Alexis Olsson (Sweden), Cecilie Bjørgås Jordheim (Norway), Cia Rinne (Germany), Elisabeth Tonnard (Netherlands), Cia Rinne (Germany), Eric Zboya (Canada), and editors Ola Ståhl and Carl Lindh (Sweden). Two CDs included in the edition included sound performances by Pär Thörn (Sweden), Gary Barwin (Canada), Helen White (Belgium / UK), Ola Lindefelt (Sweden), Andreas Kurtsson (Sweden), Magda Tyzlik-Carver (Sweden) and Andy Prior (USA). Ståhl also created *Colour's Gravity* a limited edition full-colour print in an edition of 200 copies and, with Lindh, created *Apparition*, a music box produced in an edition of 10 copies which performed the “score” of *Local Colour*.

the way in which *Local Colour* seems to split Auster's narrative text open, deterritorializing it by rendering it graphical and freeing it up, by the same gesture, to a potential excess of meaning. (Ståhl "Introduction")

*

On the rare occasions that I perform sections from *Local Colour* I draw inspiration from Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd's performance of *Prix Nobel* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1960) and by Kenneth Goldsmith's performance of *Gertrude Stein on Punctuation* (Newton: Abaton Books, 1999). Both authors perform devoid of emotion and rely on a voicing of graphed, measured empty space. These two reading styles inspired me to view *Local Colour*, both in publication and in performance, as what composer Brian Eno referred to as "ambient."

In the liner notes to his 1978 album *Music for Airports / Ambient 1*, Eno proposes music "as an atmosphere, or a surrounding influence: a tint" (Eno "Ambient"). Ambient music should be heard but not necessarily listened to. Eno contrasts ambient music with muzak and argues that

[w]hereas the extant canned music companies proceed from the basis of regularizing environments by blanketing their acoustic and atmospheric idiosyncrasies, Ambient Music is intended to enhance these. Whereas conventional background music is produced by stripping away all sense of doubt and uncertainty (and thus all genuine interest) from the music, Ambient Music retains these qualities. And whereas [muzak's] intention is to "brighten" the environment by adding stimulus to it (thus supposedly alleviating the tedium of routine tasks and leveling out the natural ups and downs of the body rhythms)

Ambient Music is intended to induce calm and a space to think. (Eno
“Ambient”)

Eno’s formulation builds upon Erik Satie’s theorizing of “furniture music.” Frustrated by music in public spaces which was too assertive, distracting diners and gallery attendees from appreciating their own conversations, Satie proposed music

that would be a part of the surrounding noises and that would take them onto account. I see it as melodious, as masking the clatter of knives and forks without drowning it completely, without imposing itself. It would fill up the awkward silences that occasionally descend on guests. It would spare them the usual banalities. Moreover, it would neutralize the street noises that indiscreetly force themselves into the pictures. (qtd. in Gilmore 232)

Satie’s proposal suggests music is meant to blot out extraneous noise (though this begs an intervention by Cage and his formulation of silence) creating a “neutralized” palate that fills up the “awkward silences.” Satie’s “furniture music” would remain effortlessly in the background, an inoffensive relaxing wash rendering all spaces prepared for discussion and thought.

Eno’s proposal for ambient music and Satie’s proposal for furniture music both foreshadow American author Tan Lin’s idea of an “ambient stylistics.” Lin constructs his work through the accumulation and documentation of the digital landscape,

a Great Pacific Garbage Patch of language, bits of which can be pasted together to make a raft of a design that Otto Neurath could never have predicted. It’s a snapshot of how we read in 2009: terminally distracted

yet managing to find, here and there, meaningful connections. (Lin
“Tan Lin”)

Lin proposes we write not to impart information but rather to (as Eno states) “blanket [...] acoustic and atmospheric idiosyncrasies” where the difference between reading and non-reading is basically negligible. Eno asserts that

Ambient Music must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting (Eno “Ambient”)

and for Lin

reading a book should be like going out to a restaurant or buying a candleholder. It should enhance the mood of the space that it occupies.
(Lin “Tan Lin”)

Lin’s repositioning of writing as an object that does not assert its own importance aligns closely with my own poetic concerns, as demonstrated most clearly in *flatland* and *Local Colour*. Concrete poetry, as I have argued in Chapter Two, should be indistinguishable from the design and language of marketing in order to transition to a new role. By inhabiting the position of logos and material to be glimpsed at and not read, Concrete poetry proposes a new way of understanding poetry.

If poetry is to be responsive to the everyday and to be a mirror to experience, then it should reflect, as accurately as possible, the means by which we approach texts. Poetry should not assert anything at all. It should be nothing but smooth and undistinguished commentary on the textual landscape within which we reside. Lin’s *Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004. The Joy of Cooking [Airport Novel Musical Poem Painting Film Photo Hallucination Landscape]* (Wesleyan University Press, 2010) asserts the urge for “poetry as wallpaper. Novel as design

object.” (Lin “Tan Lin”) *Prose of the Trans-Canada*, with its banner-like appearance—and its projection on the side of the Calgary Tower—flourishes as “poetry as wallpaper.” *Local Colour* and *flatland: a romance of many dimensions* extend Lin’s theory of an ambient stylistics beyond Lin’s own writings. While Lin proposes a “radical idea for reading: not reading” (as promoted by Kenneth Goldsmith on Wesleyan University Press’s website⁴⁵) his work still requires *reading*. Lin defines a book, in an interview with Chris Alexander, Kristen Gallagher, Danny Snelson and others, as “[s]omething that categorizes and controls data and organizes specific reading formats” but he ultimately depends on word-based writing (Alexander, et al). With *Local Colour*, I propose a form of writing that takes Eno’s formation of ambient music as “a tint” literally. Dispensing with words (and integrating Concrete poetry into its prosody), *Local Colour* is weightless and pristine, unmarked by language, consisting solely of tinted rectangles.

⁴⁵ Goldsmith’s entire endorsement reads

Tan Lin proposes a radical idea for reading: not reading. Words, so prevalent today, are merely elements that constitute fleeting engagements, one amongst many that make up the shape of our rich technological landscape. You get the sense that these words aren’t meant to last forever. By setting up a textual ecology—recycling and repurposing language—Lin makes us aware of both the material and ephemeral nature of words. Language is fluid and can be poured into many forms. Skim, dip, drop-in, tune out, click away. For this brief moment, they’ve come together between the covers of this book; tomorrow they’ll be a Facebook meme.

(<http://www.upne.com/0819569288.html>)

Eno and Lin promote an ambient aesthetic that creates “space to think” and “enhance[s] the mood” (Eno “Ambient Music”). I prefer an ambient writing which is closer to the materiality of Concrete poetry and to statements by Robert Smithson. Smithson famously argues that “[m]y sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas—i.e. ‘printed matter’” (Smithson “Language” 61) and that

[l]anguage should find itself in the physical world and not end up locked in an idea in somebody’s head [...] writing should generate ideas in to matter and not the other way around. (Smithson “Cultural Confinement” 154)

Smithson supports the poetic prioritization of the material of language, his infamous “heap of language.” Eno and Lin look to an ambient stylistics in order to create a flattened, peaceful artistic space designed to enhance such ethereal ideas as “mood,” “calm” and “a space to think.” I would rather suggest that an Ambient poetic should be more reflective of the modern milieu, emphasizing the overwhelming graphic textual ecology. Lin’s “radical idea for reading: not reading” (as Goldsmith promotes) remains anchored in the letteral if not the literary.

*

Both *Local Colour* and *flatland: a romance of many dimensions* are poetic translations, and as Robert Frost famously stated, “poetry is what gets lost in translation” (qtd. in Dworkin, *No Medium* 117). In both volumes, my translation ignores the mimesis of meaning. These two volumes embrace Conceptual poetics of appropriation and Ambient stylistics of restaurants and other boring public spaces. Instead of pointing at the wash of language that inhabits public space (the *what* and the *how much*) *Local Colour* focuses on the geographic layout of that information (the *where*). With *Local Colour*, all semantic content is “lost” in favour of chromatic

markers. These rectangles, created with MSPaint (the digital equivalent a housepainter's roller: a blunt digital instrument not known for subtlety), replace text with swatches, linguistic content with a measured patch of colour. I extend Eno's insistence that ambient music

must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention
without enforcing one in particular (Eno "Ambient")

by formulating a text that does not enforce any particular reading.

*

The combining of the sensibilities of Concrete poetry and Conceptual writing explored in *flatland: a romance of many dimensions* and *Local Colour*, coupled with the possibilities of graphic translation was predated by my painting suite "The Newspaper" (2004) [see Figure 12].

With "The Newspaper" I crafted a translation of an extant text, but instead of treating a piece of fiction I translated a single, "valueless," average edition of *The Calgary Herald*. I did not choose to interpret the newspaper of a historically important day (such as September 11, 2001 or Barack Obama's first election). Instead, I picked a singularly uninteresting day: July 18, 2002.

Over the course of two years I redrew every page from the July 18, 2002 edition of *The Calgary Herald* as a suite of 124 paintings. I didn't read the newspaper as a means of gleaning the news of the day—I read simply to categorize and sort, free of the need to report or editorialize. Nothing of note happened that day, other than the fact that thousands of newspapers were written, printed, distributed, sold, read and discarded. The newspaper is, in Smithson's words, merely "printed matter."

I tabulated the content of each article in to eight categories and assigned each a colour. That day's newspaper consisted of thirty international

news articles (assigned the colour red) and nine national news articles (yellow), eleven provincial news articles (brown) and twelve local news (pink). There were twenty-eight entertainment stories (blue), thirty-two sports articles (green), nineteen business stories (violet) and ten health articles (orange). Each different article within each category was painted in a differing shade of the assigned hue; thirty differing shades of red, nine differing shades of yellow and so on. That day's paper consisted of 151 different articles. And over 125 different advertisements—and 36 full pages of advertising inserts—which were represented by four differing shades of grey.⁴⁶

“The Newspaper” is an indictment of how we package and parse information. Like Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day* (2003) in which he retyped the contents of a single day's *New York Times* and Nancy Chunn's *Front Pages* (1997) in which she rubberstamped and collaged over the front page of every *New York Times* for a year, “The Newspaper” artistically exposes that, in the words of Marshall McLuhan

⁴⁶ Canadian critic and poet Sina Queyras discusses “The Newspaper” on her renowned blog *Lemonhound* where she writes

[p]ure colour, or pure form, seems the only acceptable response to the virulent misuse of words, the way that politicians disabuse them, clinging to various meanings at their convenience. As if in the ultimate transubstantive moment whatever Bush says at a given moment is truth because he said it, no matter what the meaning might be [...] What [B]eaulieu achieves here makes me see that this is possible, this finding meaning in alternate ways. (Queyras “reading”)

the newspaper [...] structures ordinary unawareness in patterns which correspond to the most sophisticated maneuvers of mathematical physics and modern painting. (McLuhan *Counterblast* 49)

McLuhan continues to argue that any given newspaper page is a “symbolist mosaic” that “upset[s] book culture and the book page profoundly” (McLuhan *Counterblast* 112–113).⁴⁷ “The Newspaper” removes all text from every page. What remains is a prolonged examination of the newspaper’s form and our habits of reading. With “The Newspaper” form and content become interwoven—the shape, size and arrangement of columns and text blocks are brought forward in the visual mix while the content of each article is reflected simply as a block of assigned colour. The viewer’s eye tracks by colour not by content. McLuhan suggests that reading the newspaper is an exercise in simultaneous fractured narratives and is in direct contradiction to that of normalized book reading:

[t]he format of the book page offers a linear, not a picturesque perspective. It fosters a single tone and attitude between a writer, reader, subject, whereas the newspaper breaks up the linearity and singleness of tone and perspective, offering many book pages at the same moment. (McLuhan *Counterblast* 112)

“The Newspaper” reads against “linearity and singleness of tone” in an attempt to move Conceptual writing—as cast through the lens of Concrete poetry—to a discussion of scale.

⁴⁷ McLuhan also connects the rise of the modern newspaper with Stéphane Mallarmé’s development of *Un coup de Dés jamais n’abolira le Hasard*.

Very few contemporary Concrete poets challenge scale as a compositional concern.⁴⁸ With *Prose of the Trans-Canada* I engaged with the history of artists' books and artistic precedent set by Blaise Cendrars. Both *flatland* and *Local Colour* engage with the problems of a visual novel (or visual long poem). "The Newspaper" moves from the traditionally literary book to the gallery, shifting from reading to viewing. In conversation Bök humorously notes that the reason why Concrete poetry and text art fails in a gallery setting is that people "do not like to read standing up." While that may be glib, it does reflect a problem with the production and reception of Concrete poetry. Too many Concrete poets restrict their thinking to A4 (or letter-sized) pages instead of the potentialities of the undefined dimensions of the canvas. By limiting themselves to the A4 page, Concrete poets and Conceptual writers limit their engagement to only to the most traditional definitions of a writing / reading space.

Excerpts from the "The Newspaper" have been shown periodically but most effectively as part of *Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art* at the *Museum of Contemporary Art Denver* (MOCA Denver) as curated by Nora Burnett Abrams and Andrea Andersson from October 12, 2012–February 3, 2013.⁴⁹ *Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art*, the largest exhibition MOCA Denver has ever staged, was a direct challenge to the shortcomings of

⁴⁸ There are a few very notable exceptions, most importantly Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925–2006) and his monumental *Little Sparta*.

⁴⁹ *Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art* was remounted at Toronto, Ontario's *Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery* (June 22–September 2, 2013) and Lansing, Michigan's *Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum* (March 21–September 21, 2014).

Concrete poetry and Conceptual writing. In *Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art*, canonical Conceptual artists Carl Andre, Marcel Broodthaers, Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt and Andy Warhol were restricted to book arts and publications⁵⁰ while contemporary Conceptual writers were represented by sculptural and wall-based work. 46 pieces from “The Newspaper” were chosen by Abrams and Andersson and exhibited in a grid [see Figure 12 for an exhibition view from the MOCA Denver iteration of *Postscript*].⁵¹ *Postscript* situates “The Newspaper” within the discourse of Conceptualism and the aesthetics of a gallery audience. “The Newspaper” challenges the viewer to

⁵⁰ As an example, Andy Warhol was represented by a first edition of *A: a novel* (1968). *A: a novel* is a transcription of almost 24 hours of audio tapes from Warhol’s factory. The tapes, partially transcribed by Maureen Tucker of *The Velvet Underground*, are inconsistent, idiosyncratic transcriptions of conversations, reflecting each typist’s individual choices. *A: a novel* foreshadows similar concerns in Conceptual writing, especially in the later work of Kenneth Goldsmith.

⁵¹ *Postscript* at *The Power Plant* received a great deal of attention from the local press—both academic and populist. Strangely enough, even *The Toronto Star* discussed the exhibition, and singled out “The Newspaper”:

There’s depth beyond that surface. It’s the work of writer Derek Beaulieu, who reconstructed all 124 pages of the July 18, 2002 edition of the *Calgary Herald* newspaper as a painting, coding stories and subject matter by colour. It’s simple, elegant and beautiful, with enough depth of idea to give that beauty some obsessive-minded conceptual heft. Elegance, sparseness, balance—all things conceptualism held dear. (Whyte)

see how much of the reading she does already occurs “standing up” (as Bök jokes). The glitch with Bök’s jibe is, as I’ve argued previously, that the majority of reading is already done while standing up—billboards, logos, advertising, slogans.

In order to illustrate the shortcomings of scale, it is worth contrasting *Postscript: Writing after Conceptual Art* to a contemporaneous exhibit in the UK: *Textfestival 2011*, as curated by Tony Trehy, and held in Bury, Greater Manchester. In my online review of the festival (in which I was also a participant), I argue that far too many of the submissions “did not consider the size of reproduction beyond the size of the computer screen” and were submitted

without digitally preparing [...] for printing and often [without] printing directions, which left the curator with the task of determining the printing threshold as the point at which the artwork became unacceptably pixelated. (Beaulieu “An Irresponsible Act”)

I continue, condemning the vast majority of Concrete poets (and many Conceptual writers) as

[t]hey compose work on the screen without considering the size or scale of their final product and the work suffers from that lack of foresight. Poets should compose with an eye for both the page and the gallery, for both the reader and the viewer. A central concern in visual poetry is the materiality of language; this aesthetic concern must be coupled with an eye for the

materiality of the artwork itself. (Beaulieu “An Irresponsible Act”)

In order to fully embrace a contemporary poetics, poets must move beyond traditionally poetic forms—the page, the book (and, increasingly, the website)—to forms that are more engaged with the non-poetic.

*

The thorn that remains stuck in the paw of too many Concrete poets is the need for emotional affect. There is, all too often, a desire to mean, to emote, to represent, to illustrate, and, ultimately, *to be poetic*. Conceptual writing does not reject emotion, subjectivity and affect, instead it approaches these stereotypically poetic concerns from another direction while realizing its own limitations:

It is married to ruins [...] it has no right to seek a divorce.

Writing is demonstrably inconsequential, and should accept its hollowness, the more so because nothing ever anyway

succeeds—progress is an illusion. (Galvin “Lyric Backlash”)

In Rachel Galvin’s estimation,⁵² Conceptual writing foregrounds “the artist’s controlling consciousness and discerning judgment—in a word, her

⁵² Galvin’s “Lyric Backlash: Thoughts on the Oulipo and César Vellejo in response to Calvin Bedient’s Complaints” also includes some very intriguing discussion on the potential of Conceptual writing to

provocatively rethink socio-political power dynamics and the race-based oppression that language is enmeshed with as they cutup and reconstitute texts, play with mistaken identities, and employ the

subjectivity” (Galvin “Lyric Backlash”). Embedding Conceptualism within a larger discussion of the Oulipo and constraint-based writing (and in response to Calvin Bedient’s facile “Against Conceptualism: Defending the Poetry of Affect”), Galvin contextualizes Conceptual poetics within a longer poetic discourse of ego-effacement and *taste*. Extending my discussion in Chapter One of Sianne Ngai’s formulation of a poetics of disgust, Conceptualism (and by extension all poetry) defines taste as a new emotion.

Galvin grounds her formulation of taste around the work César Vallejo, M. NourbeSe Philip, Harryette Mullen and other Post-Colonial writers who

are all participating in a broadly cannibalistic logic of poetic displacement that is an alternative to [C]onceptual or uncreative writing. (Galvin “Lyric Backlash”)

What I find intriguing about her essay are her efforts to situate taste as a humanist, lyrical decision embedded within a sense of poetic control. Olson, once again, in “Projective Verse,” argues that poetry should rid itself

of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the “subject” and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is [...] and [...] objects. (Olson “Projective Verse” 248)

Galvin’s linking of choice and taste to the ruination of language suggests that it is the poet’s role to simply pick through the wreckage and find which objects with which she identifies. This positions Conceptual writing as

cannibal as a figure of resistance to the colonial matrix of power. (Galvin “Lyric Backlash”)

descending less from Warhol, Smithson and Eno than from John Baldessari.

That said, the discussion around identity, sincerity and choice is, in my opinion, the least interesting aspect of Conceptual writing. In “My Sharona”

Robert Fitterman argues that

I’m interested in subjectivity, it just doesn’t have to be my own. As someone coming of age in the 1970s, I’m interested in how identity/self is mediated or constructed. I am who the ad says I am even when I’m not [...] As such, terms like sincere, ironic, authentic, etc. have become increasingly tired and insufficient to describe what occurs in radical appropriation. Often, radical appropriation highlights the blur between bifurcated positions of the sincere, the hoax, the authentic, etc. (Fitterman “My Sharona,” original emphasis)

Fitterman’s citation of advertising as creator of subjectivity links advertising with poetic voice.⁵³ More important than the concerns around poetic sincerity

⁵³ *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2014) is an example of how Fitterman uses a constructed subjectivity (formed entirely from phrases culled from the Internet and then crafted in to a single lyrical “I”):

It’s that time of the night when I crave singing to
 Sad songs. Like many of you,
 I’m on the sad and lonely cruise, and I don’t feel like
 I’m getting off anytime soon.
 It is scary to feel this alone, but I’m even more
 Scared of the prospect that this
 Is just the opening act. Life is so unfair. I wonder
 Why people like me exist;

or subjectivity (the question “How is this poetry?”) to me are the issues of how Conceptual writing reflects how we already understand poetry (the question “How, based on what I currently read, is this already poetry?”).

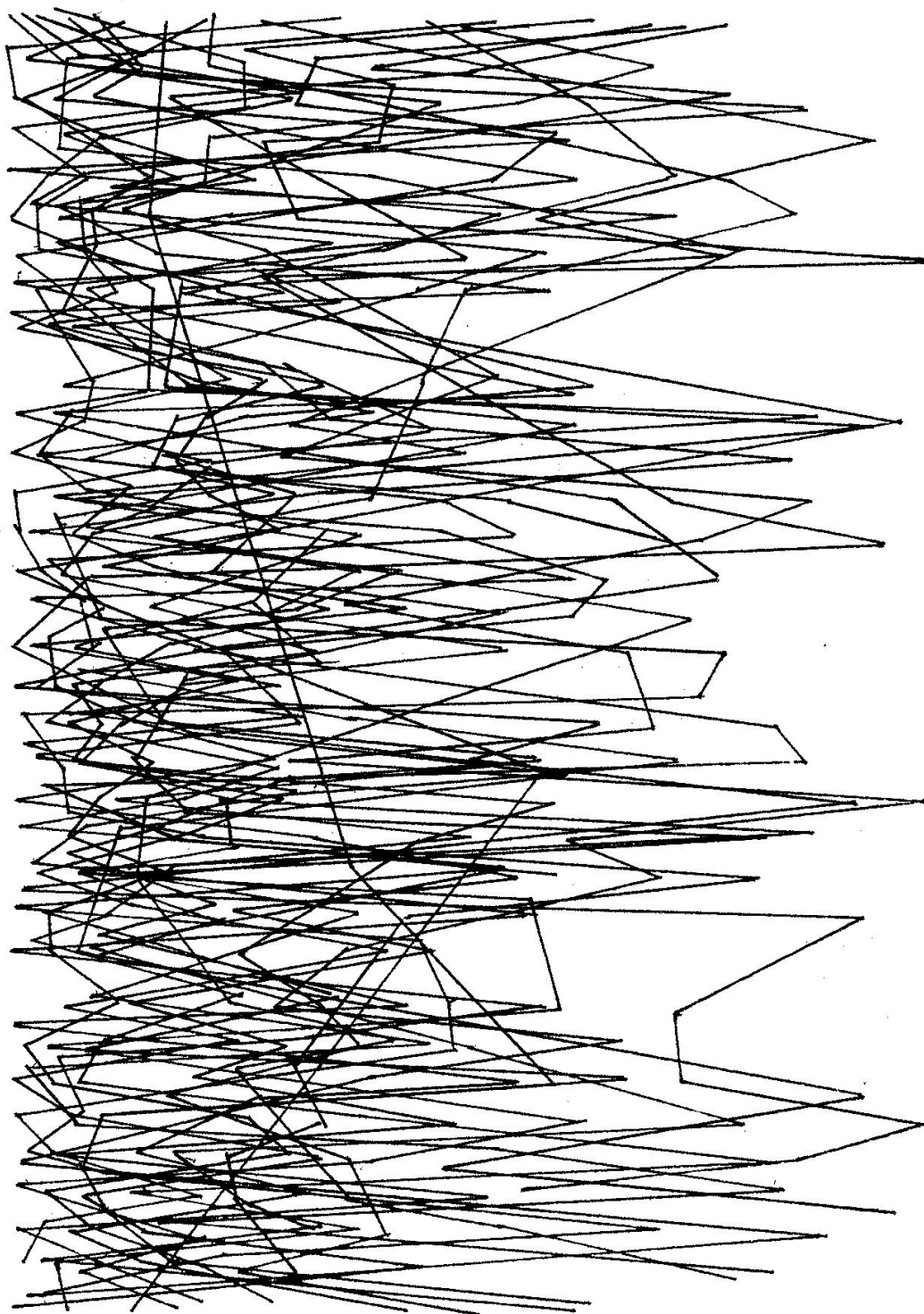


Figure 10: Derek Beaulieu *flatland: a romance of many dimensions* (2007) [excerpt]

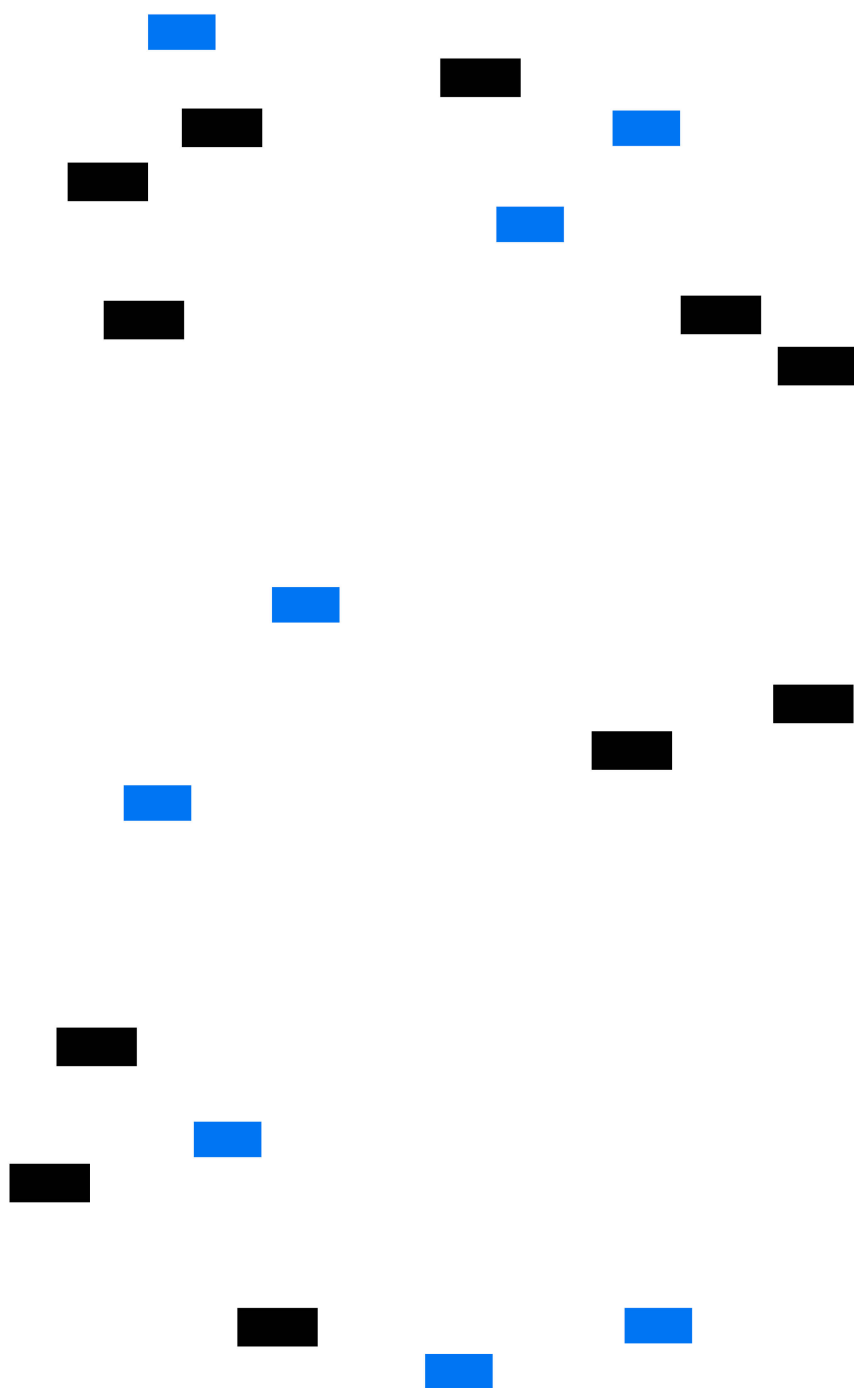


Figure 11: Derek Beaulieu *Local Colour* (2008) [excerpt]



Figure 12: Derek Beaulieu *The Newspaper* (2004) [installation view]

Conclusion

Much criticism of Conceptual writing focuses on the flashpoint of what Marjorie Perloff refers to as “unoriginality,” the poetic embrace of plagiarism, sampling, citation and theft. Goldsmith’s formulation of “uncreative,” “boring” writing, as typified by *Day* (the retyping of a single day’s *New York Times*), *Soliloquy* (the transcription of every word Goldsmith spoke for a week) and *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* (the transcription of radio broadcasts about high-profile American deaths: John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, John Lennon, the Challenger explosion, the Columbine High School shootings, the World Trade Center attacks of 9/11, and the death of Michael Jackson) have each gathered tremendous media attention surrounding the poetic potentiality of reframing and re-contextualization. Goldsmith argues that

I don’t write anything new or original. I copy pre-existing texts and
move information from one place to another (Goldsmith *Being Dumb*)
and looks to a writing that relies on plagiarism as a compositional practice.

Nowhere near as media-friendly, although similar in execution, is Vanessa Place’s *Statement of Facts* (Los Angeles: Blanc Press, 2010). *Statement of Facts* is composed exclusively from legal briefs for violent sexual offenders (Place’s day job is as an appellate court lawyer for unrepentant sexual predators) reframing the writing—without any major editorial changes (except the changing of names)—as poetry. Place argues that

[a]uthorship doesn’t matter. Content doesn’t matter. Form doesn’t
matter. Meter doesn’t matter. All that matters is the trace of poetry. Put
another way, I am a mouthpiece (Place *Echo*)

and looks to a writing which simply re-presents the existing in a way which foregrounds the uncanny, the melancholic and the deeply disturbing.⁵⁴

The focus on “unoriginality” is not surprising, but does not represent the only productive node in Conceptual writing. Conceptual writing is formulated around 4 major poetic tropes: writing that is transcriptive (exemplified by *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* and *Statement of Fact*), writing that is digitally aleatory (exemplified by Darren Wershler and Bill Kennedy’s *Apostrophe* and Nick Thurston’s *Of the Subcontract, Or Principles of Poetic Right*), writing that is Concrete (exemplified by *Flatland* and *Local Colour*), and writing that is constrained (as exemplified by Bök’s *Eunoia* and m. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!*).⁵⁵ There are

⁵⁴ Both *Being Dumb* and *Echo* were published by my No Press. In addition to Place and Goldsmith, No Press has published every major Conceptual poet: Simon Morris, Nick Thurston, Craig Dworkin, Christian Bök, Darren Wershler, Bill Kennedy, Peter Jaeger, and a generation of others. Please see Appendix 3 for a full list of No Press’s publishing from 2004 to 2013 and its predecessor housepress from 1997 to 2004.

⁵⁵ Christian Bök furthers this formulation in his *Two Dots Over a Vowel* (also published by No Press). Bök, characteristically, argues that all poetry can be indexed in one of four absolute categories:

A. Cognitive Writing: works that embody, as values, both intentionality and expressiveness. These works are both self-conscious and self-assertive. Their authors exert control over both what they “will” in the text and what they “tell” in the text.

B. Automatic Writing: Works that embody, as values, less intentionality and more expressiveness. These works are not self-conscious, but self-assertive. Their authors exert control, not over what

international examples of exemplary texts in each of the categories, but there are few who work within the field of the Conceptual Concrete.

Robert Smithson, in his 1968 statement “Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects,” argues that

poetry being forever lost must submit to its own vacuity; it is somehow a product of exhaustion rather than creation (Smithson “Sedimentation” 107)

a position echoed in the conceptual positional of LeWitt. In his famous defense of James Joyce’s *Work in Progress*, Samuel Beckett argued that “[h]ere is direct expression—pages and pages of it” (Beckett “Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce” 502) and chides the reader that

[y]ou are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other. (Beckett “Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce” 502–503)

they “will” in the text, but only over what they “tell” in the text.

C. Mannerist Writing: Works that embody, as values, more intentionality and less expressiveness. These works are self-conscious, but not self-assertive. Their authors exert control over what they “will” in the poem, but not over what they “tell” in the poem.

D. Aleatoric Writing: Works that embody, as values, no intentionality and no expressiveness. These works are neither self-conscious nor self-assertive. Their authors forfeit control, both over what they “will” in the text and over what they “tell” in the text, doing so in order to maximize the discrepancy between what the Self might intend and what the Text might convey. (Bök *Two Dots Over a Vowel*)

Beckett's defense of *Work in Progress* is temporally adaptable to become a slogan for conceptual work in general

[h]ere form *is* content, content is form [...] this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. [... this] writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*. (Beckett "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" 503, original emphasis)

Both Smithson and Beckett foreshadow conceptual poetics, a poetics of exhaustion and procedurality that looks to the writing itself for both inspiration and execution. Conceptual writing and Concrete poetry are "not about something" they are "that something itself."

*

I believe that Conceptual writing—and Concrete poetry—can also be read as an extension of Alain Robbe-Grillet's formulation of the *nouveau roman*.⁵⁶ Robbe-Grillet, in "A Future for the Novel" (1956), argues for a form of fiction beyond the categories of "literary" (whereby description is supplanted by emotion) or "absurd" (whereby description is supplanted by symbolic interpretation) (Robbe-Grillet "A Future" 19). He argues that

the world is neither significant nor absurd. It is, quite simply. That, in any case, is the most remarkable thing about it. And suddenly the obviousness of this strikes us with irresistible force. [...] Around us [...] things *are there*. Their surfaces are distinct and smooth, *intact*, neither

⁵⁶ Historic contextualization of Conceptual writing is not radical; Goldsmith and Dworkin historicize throughout their monumental anthology *Against Expression* and include Louis Aragon, Marcel Duchamp and William Butler Yeats as artistic precedents.

suspiciously brilliant nor transparent. All our literature has not yet succeeded in eroding their smallest corner, in flattening their slightest curve. (Robbe-Grillet “A Future” 19, original emphasis)

Conceptualism, like the *nouveau roman*, does not look to erode that “smallest corner,” it focuses on the objects embedded within the form of the book: the accumulated bulk of language. Foreshadowing Conceptual writing, Robbe-Grillet posits that

the visual or descriptive adjective, the word that contents itself with measuring, locating, limiting, defining, indicates a difficult but most likely direction for a new art of the novel. (Robbe-Grillet “A Future” 24)

Robbe-Grillet’s formulations are contemporaneous with, and share aesthetic concerns with, both Gomringer and the Noigandres Group’s theorization of Concrete poetry. By focusing on the “street directories, postal schedules, professional-service signs, traffic signals,” Barthes argues, Robbe-Grillet turns the gaze of the novel to the objects located within narrative (Barthes “Objective Literature” 11). But the *nouveau roman* for all of its infamous “measuring, locating, limiting [and] defining” still focuses on narrative. Characters still move through a described space in order to resolve a problem in time. There are “no alibis, no resonance, no depth” when “keeping to the surface of things, examining without emphasis” (Barthes “Objective Literature” 12) but I see Conceptual writing and Concrete poetry as extending this stylistic to the formulation of writing itself.

The *nouveau roman*’s narrative “camera,” as Barthes notes, still records within the narratively constructed space of a “traditional scenario-writer” (Barthes “Objective Literature” 12) in an attempt to deconstruct the notion of narrative time.

Conceptual writing shifts the camera from the objects in narrative space to the textual description of that narrative space,

the function of language [is] a progression of names over a surface, a patient unfolding that will gradually “paint” the object. (Barthes “Objective Literature” 12)

I designed *Local Colour* to maintain both the Noigandres Group’s concerns and emphasize the surface of the page. *Local Colour* “paints” the page with the colours embedded in Auster’s *Ghosts* by limiting itself to a *nouveau roman*-like “defining” within the constraint of “thing-words in space-time” of the Noigandres Group.

*

The three chapters in this dissertation outline how I have endeavored, over the past 16 years, to explore though Conceptual writing and Concrete poetry how language covers a plane. In small press publications and gallery exhibitions, in anthology appearances and in perfect-bound editions, I strive to explore the how our methods of reading affect our methods of writing.

Appendix 1:

Derek Beaulieu's published work, 1997–2013

In addition to the works cited in this dissertation, and outlined above, this appendix outlines the entirety of my printed oeuvre 1997–2013. This document allows for a full exploration of my published work to date.

1. Books (Authored)
2. Books (Edited)
3. Small Press editions (Edited)
4. Contributions to Peer-Reviewed Journals
5. Literary Articles in Edited Anthologies
6. Literary Articles in Magazines
7. Artistic Articles in Catalogues
8. Creative Writing in Edited Anthologies
9. Creative Writing Published in Magazines
10. Literary Ephemera and Limited Editions

1. Books (Authored)

Kern. Los Angeles, CA, USA: Les Figues Press, 2014. Print.

Please, no more poetry: the selected poetry of derek beaulieu. Kit Dobson, ed.
Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013. Print.

Kern. West Lima, WI: Xexoxial Editions, 2013. Print.

Local Colour: Ghosts, variations. Malmö, Sweden: In Edit Mode Press, 2012. Print.

Seen of the Crime: Essays on Conceptual Writing. Montréal: Snare, 2011. Print.

How to Write. Vancouver: talonbooks, 2010. Print.

Silence. Achill Island, Ireland: Red Fox Press, 2010. Print.

chains. Kingston, PA, USA: paper kite press, 2008. Print.

Local Colour. Helsinki, Finland: ntamo, 2008. Print.

flatland: a romance of many dimensions. York, UK: information as material, 2007.
Print.

fractal economies. Vancouver: talonbooks, 2006. Print.

frogments from the frag pool: haiku after basho. Toronto: The Mercury Press, 2005.
Co-written with Gary Barwin. Print.

with wax. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2003. Print.

2. Books (Edited)

Riddell, John. *Writing Surfaces: Selected Fiction of John Riddell*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013. Co-edited with Lori Emerson. Print.

bissett, bill. *RUSH: what fuckan theory; a study uv language*. Toronto: Bookthug, 2012. Co-edited with Gregory Betts. Print.

Shift and Switch: new Canadian Poetry. Co-edited with Jason Christie and Angela Rawlings. Toronto: The Mercury Press, 2005. Print.

Canadian Small Presses / Micropresses. Special Issue of *Open Letter*. 12 4 (Fall 2004). Co-edited with Jason Christie. Print.

3. Small Press editions (edited)

Weeds. Calgary: Dandelion Publications Society, 2006. Print.

The Scream Passport. Co-edited with Jason Christie. Toronto: Scream Press, 2004. Print.

Canadian Concrete and Visual Poetry. Whitewall of Sound. 33 (Portland, OR, USA). Print.

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“To be most valued by those who most value brands.” *Formes Poétiques Contemporaines*. 9 (2012): 118, 190, 295–298. Print.

“Jan 28, 1986.” *Canadian Literature*. 212 (Spring 2012): 49. Print.

“Quadrilogue: Having It Four-ways.” (with Gregory Betts, Gary Barwin and Hugh Thomas) *Open Letter*. 15 1 (Fall 2012): 23–30. Print.

“conceptualist ostranenie: a dialogue between Derek Beaulieu (Canada) and Natalia Federova (Russia)” *Jacket2*. Web.

“Tony Trehy on curating Bury’s Text Festival.” *Jacket2*. Web.

“Poetic Responses to the Holocaust: Heimrad Backer’s *transcript*.” *Jacket2*. Web.

“‘An endless, polyglot failure party:’ Robert Fitterman’s *now we are friends*.” *Jacket2*. Web.

“Copy Paste Publish: On Appropriation.” (with Gregory Betts) *Canadian Literature*. 210/211 (Autumn/Winter 2011): 254–259. Print.

1 visual poem. *Canadian Literature*. 210/211 (Autumn/Winter 2011): 115. Print.

2 visual poems. *Western Humanities Review*. 65 2 (Summer 2011): 50–51. Print.

1 visual poem. *Interim*. 27 1–2 (2009): 175. Print.

“Particle Elements: Natalie Simpson in conversation with derek beaulieu.” *Open Letter*. 13 9 (2009): 82–87. Print.

“Conceptual writing and bpNichol.” *Open Letter*. 13 8 (Spring 2009): 101–108. Print.

“Linguistic fragmentation as political intervention in Calgarian poetry.” *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. 56 (April 2008): 69–79. Print.

“Linguistic fragmentation as political intervention in Calgarian poetries.” *Open Letter*. 13 6 (Summer 2008): 107–117. Print.

“This half is for the ceremony.” *Canadian Literature*. 195 (Winter 2007): 66. Print.

“Fidgeting with the scene of the crime.” *Open Letter*. 12 7 (Fall 2005): 58–61. Print.

“‘Misshapen Chaos of well-seeming forms’: Restricted and general economies in the Concrete poetry of John Riddell, Darren Wershler-Henry and Steve McCaffery.” *Open Letter* 11 8 (2003): 110–118. Print.

“‘i need a community, feeling a little car-sick, suddenly’: a few thoughts on *Mo’ Gumbo* and *Van* magazines.” *Open Letter*. 11 6 (Fall 2002): 113–118. Print.

“‘A word in another language i can understand’: an interview with Gyongy Laky.” *Open Letter*. 11 2 (Summer 2001): 21–25. Print.

5. Literary Articles in Edited Anthologies

“The value of nothing.” *The Text Festivals: Language art and material poetry*. Ed. Tony Lopez. Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press, 2013. 37–40. Print.

“Bibliophilic dreamscapes.” *The Dark Would: anthology of language art*. Ed. Phil Davenport. Manchester: Apple Pie Editions, 2013. N.pag. Print.

“Concrete and ‘What Looks Like Poetry’.” *The Last Vispo Anthology: visual poetry 1998–2008*. Eds. Nico Vassilakis and Crag Hill. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2012. 74–77. Print.

“Statements on poetry.” *The Other Room Anthology 3*. Ed. Tom Jenks. Manchester: Other Room, 2011. 13–14. Print.

“7 nýjar myndjoðabækur.” *Af Steyphu*. Eds. Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl and Kári Páll Oskarsson. Reykjavík: Nýhil, 2009. 119–128. Print.

“housepress 1997–2004.” *some stuff on canadian spoken word and indie publishing*. Ed. Joe Blades. Fredericton: Broken Jaw, 2004. N.pag. Print.

“An Interview with derek beaulieu.” with Patrick Horner. *Crossing Place: 2003 Red Deer Writers Festival*. Red Deer: Uptoninety Press, 2003. 67–71. Print.

6. Literary Articles in Magazines

“Holiday Recommendation Guest Post #14: derek beaulieu.” Web.

“Treating letters like Lego.” *FFWD*. 18 42 (September 26–October 2 2013): 25. Print.

“Wordplay.” *Catalyst*. (Fall 2013): 18–19. Print.

“All Work and No Play Makes Jack a Dull Boy.” *Convolution*. 2 (2013): 226–229. Print.

“Advice for Aspiring Poets.” (with Sean Sullivan). *The Gauntlet*. 54 11 (September 5 2013): 9–10. Print.

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“fragments and sentences.” *The Capilano Review blog*. Web. June 28 2013.

“poets, killers and collagists.” *The Capilano Review blog*. Web. July 2 2013.

“A minimalist Conversation with derek beaulieu.” (with Andrea Johnston) *CCWWP Members Blog*. Web. June 22 2013.

“The WAR Series: Writers as Readers, with derek beaulieu.” *Open Book Toronto*. Web. June 4 2013.

“Transcend, Transcribe, Transfigure, Transform, Transgress.” *Flaunt*. 127 (Spring 2013): 80–85. Print.

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“‘You give me space to undulate’: Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse’s *Between Page and Screen*;” “A caption without a photograph”: Robert Fitterman’s *Holocaust Museum*. *filling Station*. 56 (2013): 56–57. Print.

“Compose the Holes.” *Evening will Come*. 28. Web. April 2013.

“Jordan Abel’s ‘Argiope lycosidae.’” *The Capilano Review ti-TCR web folio*. 6. Web. Spring 2013: 36–37.

“‘What Reading Has Become’: derek beaulieu’s Upcoming Exhibition, *How to Read*, in St. Catharines.” *OpenBook Toronto*. Web. March 7 2013.

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“Erica Baum is folding paper (and so are you).” *Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver Blog*. Web. February 1 2013.

- “Abstract / Concrete #2: Cecilie Bjørgås Jordheim.” *Lemon hound*. Web. February 15 2013.
- “Abstract / Concrete #3: Natalie Czech.” *Lemon hound*. Web. April 17 2013.
- “Abstract / Concrete #4: Cia Rinne.” *Lemon hound*. Web. August 10 2013.
- “An Afterwards after words: notes towards a Concrete poetic.” *The Baroda Pamphlet*. 2 (November–December 2012): 8–9. Print.
- “A Box of nothing.” *Crux Desperationis*. 3 (2012): N.pag. Print.
- “A Box of nothing.” *Rampike*. 21 1 (2012): 60. Print.
- “An Irresponsible Act of Imaginative License #4: Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Tree of Codes*,” “An Irresponsible Act of Imaginative License #6: ‘An endless, polyglot failure party’: Robert Fitterman’s *Now we are friends*,” “An Irresponsible Act of Imaginative License #7: Jonathan Ball’s *Ex Machina*.” *P-Queue*. (2012): 123–130. Print.
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- “The fabric of Jen Bervin’s work.” *Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver Blog*. Web. December 13 2012.
- “review of Helen Hajnoczky’s *Poets and Killers*.” *filling Station*. 54 (2012): 61. Print.
- “Interview: The Text Festival.” *filling Station*. 52 (2012): 41–43. Print.
- “Concrete poetry: an alphabetic dreamscape.” *Uppercase* 14 (2012): 60–63. Print.
- “Roundtable: The Bird is the Word Conference.” *Rampike*. 21 2 (2012): 50–55. Print.
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- “CCWWP Pedagogy Interview #2.” *CCWWP Members Blog*. Web. March 28 2012.
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- “Interview with Tony Trehy.” *ER: The Enclave Review*. 4 (Autumn 2011): N.pag. Print.
- “Camping Out.” *CCWWP Members Blog*. Web. September 26 2011.

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- “Abstract Language #2: ottar ormstad’s *bokstavteppekatalogen*.” *Abstract Comics: The Blog*. Web. September 1 2011.
- “Abstract Language #3: Mark Laliberte’s *brickbrickbrick*.” *Abstract Comics: The Blog*. Web. October 1 2011.
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- “26 sentences on poetry.” *The Capilano Review*. 3 13 (Winter 2011): 123–124. Print.
- “The Story behind the Art.” *Avenue*. 52 (January 2011): 26. Print.
- “Pulled off my shelves #1: Alison Turnbull’s *Spring Snow—A Translation*.” *Lemon hound*. Web. September 24 2010.
- “Pulled off my shelves #2: bill bissett’s *Rush: what fuckan theory: a study uv language*.” *Lemon hound*. Web. October 1 2010.
- “Pulled off my shelves #3: ‘There are some punctuations that are interesting and there are some punctuations that are not.’” *Lemon hound*. Web. October 8 2010.
- “Pulled off my shelves #4: ‘Besides, it’s always other people who die.’” *Lemon hound*. Web. October 15 2010.
- “Pulled off my shelves #5: ‘Compose the Holes.’” *Lemon hound*. Web. October 22 2010.
- “Pulled off my shelves #6: ‘O, though I love what others do abhor.’” *Lemon hound*. Web. October 29, 2010.
- “Pulled off my shelves #7: ‘Hence latent of satisfaction, relating singing of of bunch the effect.’” *Lemon hound*. Web. November 5 2010.
- “Pulled off my shelves #8: ‘All work and no play makes jack a dull boy’.” *Lemon hound*. Web. November 12 2010.

- “Pulled off my shelves #9: ‘Have you studied the soft toes of Geckoes?’” *Lemon hound*. Web. November 19 2010.
- “Pulled off my shelves #10: ‘It looks like ink spilled on paper.’” *Lemon hound*. Web. November 26 2010.
- “Pulled off my Shelves #11: ‘I cannot sleep unless surrounded by books.’” *Lemon hound*. Web. December 4 2010.
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- 1 visual poem. *Unarmed*. 58 (2008): N.pag. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *Xerography*. 8 (2008): N.pag. Print.
- 4 visual poems. *Fiction: the 2008 gauntlet / NōD creative writing supplement. The Gauntlet*. 48 34 (March 27 2008): 3, 5. Print.
- “1 excerpt from *Flatland*,” “Golfball.” *Peter F. Yacht Club*. 9 (January 2008): N.pag. Print.
- “Flattening *Flatland*,” “4 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *Critiphoria*. 1. Web.
- “ljóð á íslensku.” *Tregawött*. 1. Web.
- “5 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *Drunken Boat*. 9. Web.
- “6 excerpts from *Chains*.” *Beeswax*. 4. (January 2008): 29–34. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *Gar*. 7 (March 8 2008): N.pag. Print.
- 5 visual poems. *PRECIPICe*. 15 2 (Winter 2007): 40–44. Print.
- 8 visual poems. *Otoliths*. 7 (Spring 2007): 55–62. Print.
- 2 visual poems, “from Extispicium.” *NōD*. 7 (2007): N.pag. Print.
- “Golfball.” *The New Chief Tongue*. 7 (December 2007): N.pag. Print.
- “1 excerpt from *Chains*.” *Canteen*. 2 (2007): 100. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *_Room to Move*. 1 (Summer 2008): N.pag. Print.
- “Flattening *Flatland*,” “1 excerpt from *Flatland*.” *Rampike*. 16 1 (2007): 24–25. Print.
- “3 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *Spaltung*. 2 (Fall 2007): N.pag. Print.
- “2 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *Pilot Pocketbook*. 3 (2007): 107–109. Print.
- “4 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *Qwerty*. 21 (Spring 2007): 106–110. Print.
- “5 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *dANDeLion*. 33 1 (2007): 67–73. Print.
- “4 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *Spell*. 3 (February 2007): N.pag. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *Unarmed*. 57 (December 2007): N.pag. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *Riverspine*. 8 (October 2007): N.pag. Print.
- “5 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *Nypoesi*. 4 6 (2007). Web.

- “2 visual translations.” *Nypoesi*. 4 7 (2007). Web.
- “Trio.” *Open Letter*. 13 3 (Summer 2007): 5. Print.
- “untitled (for Brian Kim Stefans).” *Open Letter*. 13 1 (Fall–Winter 2006–7): 62. Print.
- “Flatland (Flattened).” *FRONT*. XVIII 3 (May–June 2007): 25. Print.
- 9 visual poems. *Literatura na Swiecie*. 11/12 (2007): 356–361, 373. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *Gar*. 2 (July 14 2007): N.pag. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *Gar*. 5 (October 13 2007): N.pag. Print.
- 2 visual poems. *Peter F. Yacht Club*. 5 (February 2007): N.pag. Print.
- 2 visual poems. *Matrix*. 77 (Summer 2007): 14–15. Print.
- 8 poems. *Pilot: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry*. 1 (2006): 31. Print.
- 5 visual poems. *Pilot Pocketbook*. 2 (2006): 40–42. Print.
- 6 visual poems. *Drunken Boat*. 8. Web.
- 5 visual poems. *The New Chief Tongue*. 5 (December 2006): N.pag. Print.
- 2 visual poems. *Opened Visual*. 1 (Spring 2006): 7–8. Print.
- 7 visual poems. *BOTHBOTH*. (2006): N.pag. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *Four Minutes to Midnight*. 8 (December 2006): 132–133. Print.
- 2 visual poems. *Whitewall of Sound*. 35 (2006): N.pag. Print.
- 5 visual poems. *Spire*. 3 8 (June 2006): 1–3. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *hex map*. (May 31 2006): N.pag. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *hick moth*. (July 2 2006): N.pag. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *dig!* 11 (2006): 1. Print.
- 2 visual poems. *Offerta Speciale*. 19 37 (May 2006): 50–51. Print.
- 5 visual poems. *Grimm*. 3 (Summer 2006): 52–57. Print.
- 3 visual poems. *Bird Dog*. 7 (Spring 2006): 26–28. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *Avenue*. (January / February 2006): 126. Print.

- 4 visual poems. *BafterC*. 2 1 (January 2006): 5, 21, 28, 36. Print.
- “5 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *NōD*. 4 (Fall 2006): 38–43. Print.
- “Extispicium.” *NōD*. 5 (Winter 2006): 28–29. Print.
- 3 visual poems. *Drill*. 7 (2006): N.pag. Print.
- 3 visual poems. *The Tiny*. 2 (2006): 27–29. Print.
- 2 visual poems. *Matrix*. 73 (Spring 2006): 8. Print.
- “2 excerpts from *Flatland*.” *Matrix*. 75 (Fall 2006): 36–37. Print.
- “Tracking the history of Canada.” *Matrix*. 71 (Summer 2005): 8. Print.
- 3 poems. *Open Letter*. 12 5 (Spring 2005): front cover, 84–86. Print.
- 3 visual poems. *NōD*. 1 (Fall 2005): 9–11. Print.
- 3 visual poems. *NōD*. 2 (Winter 2005–2006): 24–26. Print.
- 5 visual poems. *dANDelion*. 31 2 (2005): 65–69. Print.
- 2 visual poems. *SPUR*. 7 (December 2005): 7. Print.
- “To-get-her, we ran full.” (with Gregory Betts) *Spur*. 6 (2005): 13. Print.
- 2 visual poems. *Asemic*. 4 (2005): N.pag. Print.
- 3 visual poems. *fhole*. 5 (2005): N.pag. Print.
- 4 visual poems. *West Coast Line*. 44 (38 2) (Summer 2005): 153–156. Print.
- 2 poems. *Queen Street Quarterly*. 7 4 (2005): 44–45. Print.
- 1 poem. *Hat*. 75 (March 11 2005): 1. Print.
- 5 visual poems. *The Capilano Review*. 2 45 (Winter 2005): 49–54. Print.
- 3 Poems. *The Gig*. 17 (October 2004): 31–32. Print.
- 2 Poems. *The Walrus*. 1 7 (September 2004): 56–57. Print.
- 4 poems. *Kinetic Magazine*. 1 (2004): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *fhole* 1. (August 2004): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. (with Pete Spence) *Black and White Spleen*. 1: N.pag. Print.

- 1 poem. (with Pete Spence) *Hat*. 18.5 (January 4 2004): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. (with Pete Spence) *Hat*. 25 (February 21 2004): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *Paper in the Pocket*. 1 (May 2004): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *Matrix*. 66 (2004): 3. Print.
- 1 poem. *Montgomery Clift*. 1 (2004): 7. Print.
- “Calcite Gours 1–19.” *Stanzas*. 38 (2004): passim. Print.
- 4 poems. *filling Station*. 30 (Spring 2004): 32–33. Print.
- “variance (august).” *filling Station*. 29 (2004): 14. Print.
- 1 poem. *The NEWsletter*. 6 2 (Fall 2004): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *The NEWsletter*. 6 1 (January / February 2004): N.pag. Print.
- 3 poems. *Maple Spits*. 1 (October / December 2003): N.pag. Print.
- 2 poems. *Farrago*. 3/4 (2003): N.pag. Print.
- 2 poems. *Xerography: The triple edition*. (Winter 2003): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *The NEWsletter*. 5 5 (November / December 2003): 11. Print.
- 1 poem. *Peter O’Toole*. 1 (May 2003): N.pag. Print.
- 11 poems. *Arras*. 5 (2003): N.pag. Print.
- 2 poems. *Whitewall of Sound*. 33 (Spring 2003): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *YARD*. 2 (March 2003): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *SUDDEN MAGAZINE*. 3 (2002): N.pag. Print.
- 9 poems. *West Coast Line*. 38 (36 2) (Fall 2002): 42–46. Print.
- 1 poem. *Whitewall of Sound*. 32 (Winter 2002): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *SUDDEN MAGAZINE*. 2 (Fall 2002): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *Lost and Found Times*. 49 (December 2002): 19. Print.
- “from type is impressed.” *Van*. 75 (February 23 2002): 1. Print.
- 3 poems. *SUDDEN MAGAZINE*. 1 (Summer 2002): N.pag. Print.

- “Blazons.” *Unarmed*. 32 (September 2002): N.pag. Print.
- 1 poem. *YARD*. 1 (July 2002): N.pag. Print.
- 10 poems. *Existere*. 22 1 (Winter 2002): 57–70. Print.
- 1 poem. (with ross priddle) *SPOILATION RESULTS*. 6. (May 2 2002): N.pag. Print.
- “2 poems from Lascaux.” *Queen Street Quarterly*. 5 4 / 6 1 (Spring 2002): 45–46. Print.
- “from ____.” *Olive*. 2 4 (December 2001): passim. Print.
- “pronoun woven.” *filling Station*. 22 (2001): 4–5. Print.
- “Home Decoration Guide.” (with Neil Hennessy) *Open Letter*. 11 2 (Summer 2001): 103–105. Print.
- 1 poem. *Van*. 61 (November 3 2001): 1. Print.
- “(copyright).” *Van*. 57 (September 22 2001): 1. Print.
- 1 poem. *Van*. 39 (March 31 2001): 1. Print.
- “from Sheet Music.” *Queen Street Quarterly*. 4 1 (Spring 2000): 59. Print.
- 1 poem. *Polartis 2000*. (June 2000): back cover. Print.
- “10/unknown.” *Polartis 2000*. (April 2000): 3. Print.
- “Sound poem in 4/4 time (for bpNichol).” *Polartis 2000*. (February 2000): 8. Print.
- 5 poems. *Laughing Gland*. 2 (Spring 2000): 4–5. Print.
- 5 poems. *Basinski: a zine of the arths*. 5 (May 2000): 19–26. Print.
- 1 poem. *Haiku Canada Newsletter*. XIII 2 (February 2000): 6. Print.
- 1 poem. *RAW NerVZ HAIKU*. VI 3 (Fall 2000): 4. Print.
- 2 poems. *RAW NerVZ HAIKU*. VII 1 (Spring 2000): 6, 22. Print.
- 1 poem. *RAW NerVZ HAIKU*. VI 2 (Summer 2000): 41. Print.
- 1 visual poem. *Lost and Found Times*. 44 (June 2000): 46. Print.
- “The Noah Project.” *Van*. 22 (November 13 2000): 1–3. Print.
- 1 poem. *Van*. 1 (March 2000): 1. Print.

- “trig.” *Mo’Gumbo*. 24 (February 24 2000): 1. Print.
- “from *Syntax*.” (*orange*). 1 (2000): 14–15. Print.
- 1 poem. *endNote*. 2 (2000): 23. Print.
- “Ah (for bpNichol).” *Rampike*. 11 1 (1999): 56. Print.
- 2 poems. *Queen Street Quarterly*. 2 4 / 3 1 (Winter/Spring 1999): 26–27. Print.
- 5 poems. *Open Letter*. 10 6 (Summer 1999): 41–43. Print.
- 5 poems. *in grave ink*. 2 (1999): N.pag. Print.
- “Ti(l)de.” *POLARTIS Special Issue 1999 (A Decade After)*. (1999): 6. Print.
- “yo-yo by pondside.” *Empty Galaxy*. 1 (1999): 123. Print.
- “text/er.” *Offerta Speciale*. 12 23 (May 1999): 52. Print.
- 2 poems. *RAW NerVZ HAIKU*. vi 1 (Spring 1999): 5, 44. Print.
- “nmh.” *Mo’Gumbo*. 15 (December 10 1999): 1. Print.
- “pulling stain.” *Mo’Gumbo*. 13 (November 26 1999): 1. Print.
- “wood and tin.” *Grove*. 1 (Winter 1998): 13. Print.
- 2 poems. *Bulldog Breath*. 5 (Summer 1998): 4–5. Print.
- 2 poems. *Dig!* 4 (1998): N.pag. Print.
- “A: filling.” *Seeds*. 6 1 (1998): passim. Print.
- 5 poems. *Articulata*. 1 (Fall 1997): 17–20. Print.

10. Literary Ephemera and Limited Editions

- The Value of Nothing*. Calgary: 100 têtes press, 2013.
- Kokophonie 5*. Berlin: Broken Dimanche Press, 2013. (with Eric Zboya)
- All work and No Play Makes Jack a Dull Boy*. Los Angeles, CA, USA: Rabble, 2012.
- Economies of Scale*. (with rob mclennan) Ottawa: above/ground, 2012.
- Untitled (for Billy Mavreas)*. Toronto: puddles of sky press, 2012.
- Colour*. Vernon, BC: twenty-two press, 2011.

- Prose of the Trans-Canada*. Toronto: BookThug, 2011.
- db*. Schenectady, NY, USA: dbpq, 2011.
- 8 visual poems*. Montreal: Distroboto, 2010.
- Quartet for 6 voices*. Mayne Island, BC: Perro Verlag, 2010.
- dent and bent*. Calgary: privately published, 2010.
- Object 005*. Manchester, UK: zimzalla, 2010.
- Swarms*. Jacksonville, FL, USA: avantacular press, 2010.
- This is Visual Poetry*. Kingston, PA, USA: paper kite press, 2010.
- collide-o-scope*. (with Andrew Topel) Jacksonville, FL, USA: avantacular press, 2010.
- Fierce Indulgence*. Torino, Italy: Offerta Speciale, 2010.
- "FFFF." (with Luc Fierens). Belgium: postfluxpostbooklets, 2009.
- √. Cork, Ireland: default press / dusie chaps, 2009.
- 3 poems for K*. Calgary: privately printed, 2009.
- wild rose country*. Ottawa: above/ground press, 2009.
- dsol*. Oslo, Norway: Forlaget Attåt, 2008.
- selections from Local Colour*. Portland, ME, USA: Tonerworks, 2008.
- An excerpt from Local Colour*. Toronto: Nietzsche's Brolly, September 2008.
- [untitled]*. Toronto: Nietzsche's Brolly, September 2008.
- An excerpt from Local Colour*. Toronto: Nietzsche's Brolly, September 2008.
- lthy*. Jacksonville, FL, USA: avantacular press, 2008.
- How to Write: Chapter A*. Edmonton: above/ground, 2008.
- Hell Passport 9*. Mayne Island, BC: Perro Verlag Books by Artists, 2008.
- collide-o-scope*. (with Andrew Topel) Jacksonville, FL, USA: avantacular press, 2007.
- 2 more poems*. Calgary: No Press, 2007.
- Flatland No. 25–35*. Calgary: skin of me teeth press, 2007.

- Flatland No. 21*. Ottawa: Griddle Grin, 2006.
- seize oiseaux*. London, UK: ytcommunication, 2006.
- DAB*. (with kevin mcpherson eckhoff). Calgary: skin of me teeth press, 2006.
- hex math*. (with Sean Bonney, Kai Fierle-Hedrick, Frances Kruk). London, UK: ytcommunication, 2006.
- Pitt Graphit 129904 4B*. London, UK: Writers Forum, 2005.
- ffllj*. Calgary: ModL press, 2005.
- [the orange manifesto]*. Calgary: ModL press, 2005.
- Calcite Gours*. London, UK: Writers Forum, 2005.
- call and response*. (with Jonathan Ball) Calgary: Martian Press, 2005.
- [Dear Fred]*. Ottawa: above/ground, 2004.
- With Wax*. Buffalo: Cuneiform Press, 2003.
- Velvet touch lettering*. Calgary: yardpress, 2002.
- []*. Toronto: BookThug, 2002.
- 9 months*. Calgary: slowdownpress, 2001.
- after basho*. Toronto: poemEpress, 2000.
- basho's decadent chinese food*. Brampton: poetic immolation press, 1999.
- A/"AH."* Victoria, Australia: MIGHTY THIN BOOKS, 1999.
- Frog's eye view: 2 bashos among friends*. (with Neil Hennessy) Brampton: poetic immolation press, 1999.
- bash(o)ful pondifications*. Toronto: Kitsch In Ink Press, 1999.
- A Preliminary Report on Alphabetic Velocity*. (with Neil Hennessy) Brampton: poetic immolation press, 1999.
- portrait 4*. Ottawa: above/ground press, 1999.
- framing the narrative*. Vancouver: Pulley Press, 1999.
- IV.08/13/97 ("her fear of the silence after she spoke")*. Ottawa: above/ground press, 1998.

A? : Any Questions? Ottawa: above/ground Press, 1998.

Keyboard Po(e/li)tics. (with Neil Hennessy) Brampton: poetic immolation press, 1997.

Appendix 2: Derek Beaulieu's artistic exhibitions, 1997–2013

This appendix outlines the entirety of my exhibition history 1997–2013. Due to the visual nature of my work, it is noteworthy to explore how international galleries embrace Concrete poetry and Conceptual writing.

1. Solo Exhibitions
2. Contributions to Group Exhibitions

1. Solo Exhibitions

How to Read. Niagara Arts Centre, St. Catharines, ON.

Prose of the Trans Canada. Thunder and Lightning. Sackville, NB.

Selections from The Alphabet. Wordfest 2011 / Wordfeast. Calgary, AB.

Prose of the Trans Canada. Wordfest 2011 / Calgary Tower. Calgary, AB.

Brodsky Gallery @ KWH / University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA, USA.

1115 / 2:47: Pages. Pages Books on Kensington, Calgary, AB.

Chains. Calgary International Spoken Word Festival, Calgary, AB.

Chains. Uppercase Gallery, Calgary, AB.

Section E: Entertainment. Litteraturhuset. *Oslo poesifestival.* Oslo, Norway.

poetics as objects. TRUCK Gallery, Calgary, AB.

Section E: Entertainment. The Nýhil International Poetry Festival. Reykjavík, Iceland.

The Newspaper. The Little Gallery, Calgary, AB.

Section F: Sports. TRUCK Gallery, Calgary, AB.

Anat(w)omy, The New Gallery, Calgary, AB.

2. Contributions to Group Exhibitions

Postscript: Writing after Conceptual Art. The Powerplant, Toronto, ON.

Printing Out the Internet. Labor. Mexico City, Mexico.

The Reading Unroomed. Aarhus LittearturCenter. Aarhus, Denmark.

The Nabokov Paper: an experiment in novel reading. Shandy Hall, York, UK.

Pluss pluss / ++. Black Box Theatre. Olso, Norway.

A Death Greatly Exaggerated: Canada's Small and Thriving Small Press. Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library. University of Toronto. Toronto, ON.

Audiatur Print [The Boring as Safari]. publication studio malmö. Malmö, Sweden.

Postscript: Writing after Conceptual Art. Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, CO, USA.

2011–2012 All Faculty Exhibition. Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Calgary, AB.

2012–2013 All Faculty Exhibition. Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Calgary, AB.

Text Art—Poetry for the Eye. Tampereen taidemuseo, Tampere, Finland.

Audiatur Print Exhibit. Bergen Kjøtt Kulturhus. Bergen, Norway.

Møllebyfestivalen. Momentum art festival, Moss, Norway.

Z-shelves. Foyle Archive Room, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK.

A print. Gallery ANX, Grünerløkka, Oslo, Norway.

A Kind of Huh? Les Abattoirs, Toulouse, France.

The Concrete and Sound: A Collection of Victoria Concrete and Sound poetry from the 80s to 00s. Talk is Cheap, Victoria, BC.

Language to Cover a Wall: Visual Poetry through its Changing Media. University of Buffalo Art Gallery, Center for the Arts. Buffalo, NY, USA.

The Emblem of My Work. Shandy Hall Gallery, Coxwold, Yorkshire, UK.

Reading.Writing. galleryHOMELAND, Portland, OR, USA.

Selection Upstart. The Dock Ireland Arts Centre, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, Ireland.

Manifestos Now! SFU Teck Gallery, Vancouver, BC.

The Bird is the Word. Niagara Arts Centre, St. Catharines, ON.

Textfestival 3. Bury Art Museum, Bury, UK.

synesthesia: unframed, unbound(ed). Latitude 53, Edmonton, AB.

Tea pARTy. Resolution Gallery, Calgary, AB.

The Perverse Library. Shandy Hall, York, UK.

Hear This / See Me, Latitude 53, Edmonton, AB.

Miss Read Artist Book Festival, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany

Private Circulation. Capricious Space, New York, NY, USA.

Writing Encounters. York St John University, York, UK.

Perro Verlag's Hell Passport Series. Boekie Woekie Gallery, Amsterdam, Holland.

Less is More: the Poetics of Erasure. Simon Fraser University Gallery, Burnaby, BC.

CRSL 23+. INDEXG Gallery, Toronto, ON.

The inarticulate mark. The Scream Literary Festival. Type Books and Gallery, Toronto, ON.

handmade book exhibit. Gallery Vertigo, Vernon, BC.

Visions – part one – information as material. Johan Deumens Editions and Artists' Books, Haarlem, Netherlands.

TypeBlock: Photography + Typography. Exposure 2008 Calgary / Banff Photography Festival. Uppercase Gallery, Calgary, AB.

Visual Poetry in the Avant Writing Collection. Rare books and manuscripts library, Ohio State University.

UNREADABILITY: language harm. Eyedrum Gallery, Atlanta, GA, USA.

Eye Scream II: The Visual Life of Words. The Scream Literary Festival. Gallery 401, Toronto, ON.

Eye Scream: A Night of Visual Poetry. The Scream Literary Festival. Virus Arts Gallery and Objectorium, Toronto, ON.

An American Avant Garde: Second Wave. An exhibit featuring work from the avant writing collection. Rare books and manuscripts library, Ohio State University. Columbus, OH, USA.

An American Avant Garde: First Wave. An exhibit featuring the William S Burroughs collection and work by other avant garde artists. Rare books and manuscripts library, Ohio State University. Columbus, OH, USA.

Ex Libris: an exhibition of regional artists' books. Medicine Hat Municipal Art Gallery / Medicine Hat Public Library, Medicine Hat, AB.

NETWORK CABINET: Contemporary International Visual Poetry, Geelong, Australia.

Summer for Members: Artist Books, The New Gallery, Calgary, AB.

VOID/X: an exhibition of recent international visual poetry, Melbourne, Australia.

Sandstone City Framing and Art Gallery, Calgary, AB.

Alternative Bookworks, Muttart Public Art Gallery Calgary, AB.

Celebrating Summer Solstice, The Center Gallery, Calgary, AB.

Mother/Maman: Mail Art Project / Projet d'art Postal, Montreal, PQ.

mail art. Muttart Public Art Gallery, Calgary, AB.

Appendix 3:
**Editions published by housepress (1997–2004) and No Press (2005–2013),
as edited by Derek Beaulieu**

1. housepress (1997–2004)
2. No Press (2005–2013)

1. housepress (1997–2004)

beaulieu, derek and Neil Hennessy. *William S. Burroughs: Ghost of Steel*. Calgary/
Brampton: housepress / poetic immolation press, November 1997. 26 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *Distorted Underwood*. Calgary: housepress, November 1997. 4
copies.

Countryman, Marie. *Marie Countryman's "Insomnia Quartet."* Calgary: housepress,
November 1997. 26 copies.

Hennessy, Neil. *We represent peewee press*. Calgary: housepress, 1997. 50 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *ti(l)de*. Calgary: housepress, 1997. 8 copies.

Schmidt, Andrea. *Found: poem*. Calgary: housepress, 1997. 50 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *ploein*. Calgary: housepress, 1997. 12 copies.

Barwin, Gary. *Apon'd (frogments from the frag pond)*. Calgary: housepress, 50
copies.

beaulieu, derek. *pullcart: moving*. Calgary: housepress, 1997. 16 copies.

_____. "©. Calgary: housepress, 1997. 12 copies.

_____. *Frost's fencing corp*. Calgary: housepress, 1997. 16 copies.

_____. *26: alphabetize*. Calgary: housepress, 1997. 25 copies.

snow, tj, Shereen Tuomi, cjfyffe, Ian Samuels, Courtney Thompson and Jonathon
Wilcke. *I do not know this story / boneyard: a suite*. Calgary: housepress,
Fenbruary 1998. 50 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *al/ph/abet: (de)find*. Calgary: housepress, February 1998. 25 copies.

Countryman, Marie. *Words & Pictures*. Calgary: housepress, April 1998. 26 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *"Xian*. Calgary: housepress, March 1998. 10 copies.

_____. *Lateral Forces*. Calgary: housepress, March 1998. 24 copies.

_____. *Joint / lateral forces*. Calgary: housepress, March 1998. 14 copies.

- _____. “: *A Book of Vowels*. Calgary: housepress, April 1998. 15 copies.
- _____. *a small love poem*. Calgary: housepress, June 1998. 30 copies.
- muir, tom. *Station airy*. Calgary: housepress, 1998. 50 copies.
- fyffe, cj. 9898/8998. Calgary / Leeds: housepress, sehkmenterprize ink, June 1998. 100 copies.
- beaulieu, derek and Neil Hennessy. *Keyboard Po(e/i)tics*. Calgary / Brampton: housepress / poetic immolation press, July 1998. 40 copies.
- _____. *Shakespeare's sonnets rendered as a multi-coloured 'O'*. Calgary: housepress, July 1998. 60 copies.
- beaulieu, derek. A: filling. Calgary: housepress, July 1998. 4 copies.
- _____. *capital 'A' schematic*. Calgary: housepress, September 1998. 11 copies.
- _____, ed. *TTbpN & otHerworks*. Calgary: housepress, September 1998. 25 copies. Includes poetry from Michael Basinski, russ rickey, Neil Hennessy, Carl Peters and the editor.
- Samuels, Ian. *Fuga*. Calgary: housepress, September 1998. 50 copies.
- Hennessy, Neil. *Soul / R&B*. Calgary: housepress, September 1998. 50 copies.
- _____. *The circuitry of the alphabet: a preliminary report*. Calgary: housepress, October 1998. 50 copies.
- beaulieu, derek. *A Christmas Star*. Calgary: housepress, November 1998. 16 copies.
- _____. *after basho*. Calgary: housepress, October 1998. 24 copies.
- _____. *basho's pond*. Calgary: housepress, October 1998. 24 copies.
- _____. *fonder*. Calgary: housepress, October 1998. 5 copies.
- _____. *congradgraduaLtions*. Calgary: housepress, October 1998. 25 copies.
- _____. *read*. Calgary: housepress, November 1998. 16 copies.
- _____. *black & white (for p.banting)*. Calgary: housepress, November 1998. 16 copies.
- _____. *bash0: sum somes*. Calgary: housepress, November 1998. 8 copies.
- _____. *basho's thot process*. Calgary: housepress, December 1998. 9 copies.

beaulieu, derek and Neil Hennessy. *The devotion of ive*. Calgary: housepress, December 1998. 10 copies.

Grenville, Ruth, ed. *Sidereal: a shining luminary calendar for 1999*. Calgary: housepress / filling Station publications society, December 1999. 250 copies. Includes poetry by: russ rickey, Jill Armstrong, Emily Cargan, Dean Irvine, Neil Hennessy, Shane Rhodes, Ian Samuels, tjsnow, Jacqueline Turner, Rajinderpal S. Pal, Thorsten Nesch, Michelle Bodnar, Courtney Thompson, Steve McCaffery and derek beaulieu.

Upton, Lawrence. *House*. Calgary: housepress, December 1998. 24 copies.

Cain, Stephen. *Window Wavering*. Calgary: housepress, December 1998. 25 copies.

Whitehead, Ron. *Kokopelli: Lament (Second Kingdom)*. Calgary: housepress, December 1998. 50 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *Frost's fencing corp*. [2nd edition] Calgary: housepress, 1998. 50 copies.

_____. *fEEl*. Calgary: housepress, 1998. 50 copies.

_____. *haiku 1*. Calgary: housepress, 1998. 30 copies.

Hennessy, Neil. *The well*. Calgary: housepress, 1998. 50 copies.

Fyffe, cj. *My night in steinian armoire*. Calgary: housepress, 1998. 50 copies.

mclennan, rob. *Poem for stuart ross*. Calgary: housepress, 1998, 30 copies.

Whitehead, Ron. *Kokopelli: Lament (Second Kingdom)*. [2nd printing] Calgary: housepress, January 1999. 50 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *the city on prairie writing*. Calgary: housepress, January 1999. 28 copies.

mclennan. rob. *Bagne*. Calgary: housepress, January 1999. 50 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *gravity*. Calgary: housepress, January 1999. 5 copies.

_____. *Framing the Narrative*. Calgary: housepress, January 1999. 15 copies.

_____. *5¢: a landscape for bp*. Calgary: housepress, January 1999. 16 copies.

_____. *A pyramid*. Calgary: housepress, February 1999. 10 copies.

_____. *For AG*. Calgary: housepress, February 1999. 15 copies.

beaulieu, derek and Courtney Thompson. *Movement (for bpNichol)*. Calgary: housepress, February 1999. 30 copies.

beaulieu, derek, ed. *TTbpN2: Translating Translating bpNichol part 2*. Calgary: housepress, 1999. 40 copies. Includes poetry by Michael Basinski, Gregory Betts, Stephen Cain, Carolyn Fyffe, Neil Hennessy, bpNichol, Carl Peters, russ rickey, Stephen Scobie, Jonathon C. Wilcke and the editor.

beaulieu, derek and Courtney Thompson. *Witticism under pressure*. Calgary: housepress, April 1999. 20 copies.

Hennessy, Neil. *Pathways: an alphabet*. Calgary: housepress, April 1999. 30 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *3 bashos for n.m.hennessy*. Calgary: housepress, April 1999. 20 copies.

_____. *ripples*. Calgary: housepress, April 1999. 20 copies.

Hennessy, Neil. *Alphaglyphs*. Calgary: housepress, April 1999. 30 copies.

beaulieu, derek. *ripples*. [2nd state] Calgary: housepress, April 1999. 20 copies.

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- de wit, johan. *footnotes*. Calgary: housepress, 2002. 60 copies.
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- beaulieu, derek, ed. *Off The Shelf: a broadsheet collection in honour of Don Gorman and Shakespeare's Shelf*. Calgary: housepress, 2003. 50 copies. Includes poetry and artwork by Jason Christie, Paulo da Costa, Tammy McGrath, David Carruthers, Tomas Jonsson, Trevor Speller, Richard Harrison, Christopher Blais, Natalie Simpson, Julia Williams, Janet Neigh, Andre Rodrigues and the editor.
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